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Nepal, Land of Mystery



Hassoldt Davis : **Nepal**
Land of Mystery

*Adventures in Burma China
India and the Kingdom of Nepal*

London 1943 / Readers Union



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Preface

IT IS OF primary importance that I claim full responsibility for all general opinions in my *Nepal*, *Land of Mystery*, and for all errors of fact. This is the story of the expedition as I saw it. Though the writing of the book has been generously permitted me by Armand Denis and Leila Roosevelt Denis, and though I have tried sincerely to view our joint labours through their eyes as well as mine, I hope no reader will ascribe to them my own follies.

If it should seem that the dramatic incidents of the expedition follow each other closely, I should admit that I have deliberately so arranged them, for the sound reason I think, that the reader may not be bored by the long periods inevitable on any expedition, when nothing of significance happens at all. The exciting moments I have toned down as much as possible for the sake of those who find it hard to believe that in the Eastern countries adventures are usually more sudden and more intense than similar ones at home.

Actually, our expedition did not end in Nepal. We drove south to Bombay, took ship for Africa and spent several months filming lion, black rhinoceros and several unpleasant native tribes, but this period, I hope, will make a book in itself. It is not of a piece with our Asiatic journeys.

I wish to affirm in conclusion the thanks I owe most deeply to Armand and Leila Roosevelt Denis, who made this book possible by inviting me on the expedition as an independent writer and photographer. It is due to their expert and cordial management that we all were able to enjoy the few real hardships we encountered with none of the personal discord common to most expeditions. We wore well.

HASSOLDT DAVIS

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Flight to the East

I

STILL THERE WAS music; there was no war then. At five-thirty in the morning the little bars of Amsterdam were singing to their last customers, and the chant of "Prosit!" pulsed everywhere along the back streets of the Rembrandtplein Plaza. The carillon of a near church was jangling like a hurdy-gurdy, and the birds were wakening with minute, musical yawns as our car for Schiphol Airport slipped quietly over the bridges of the canals. Their waters were olive-green beneath the thin blue of the sky, brightened occasionally by the flower barges moored to the causeways.

"Rangoon next," said Armand, tangling his long legs around the bucket seats.

"And monsoon weather." Leila turned up the collar of her coat.

Rangoon. Monsoon. They were rich words to me who had not been in the East for several years, words like gong notes. It seemed fantastic that within four days from Amsterdam we should be in Rangoon and the monsoon together. Armand Denis and his wife, Leila Roosevelt, were to make a new film in the East, and the first lap of the journey was to be travelled by plane; seven thousand miles in just four days' flying, not counting the nights which we should spend on earth. It was impious; it was a travesty of time and space. Though the flight served admirably our need to reach Asia before the monsoon became severe, I regretted that we should merely skim the lands *en route*.

Five canals, curving through Amsterdam like the strands of a web, passed beneath us; neat farms and car junk yards alternated—the latter, I noticed, called "Autoslopery," an excellent term—and soon we were at the K.L.M. Airport of Schiphol.

There was the plane which was to house us for four fast

days, a great winged whale of aluminium. The officers were moving about it casually, as if the journey ahead, a quarter of the way around the world, meant no more than a stroll across the iron canal bridges. The steward touched my elbow.

"We're ready to start," he yawned.

We Jonahs leaned back comfortably in the belly of that leviathan as it gradually accelerated, and then with a lift which seemed close to physical ecstasy rose clear of the magnetic earth. Green and buff-coloured fields slanted beneath us, and the enormous Dutchman in the seat ahead looked down at his tiny Holland and whispered, "Enormous!" Everything was enormous: "An expedition? Ah, enormous! The Sino-Japanese war? Enormous! Those beautiful Burmese? Enormous! The smells . . ."

It was less than two weeks ago that I had tackled my stairs on Lower Fifth Avenue with some misgiving, five flights of them leading up and up around hairpin bends. They looked very long. I was getting soft, I thought. The desk and the late nights had withered the wind in me, at thirty-three. I was quite willing for Maupi and Fella, our two brawny pups, to rush ahead at the end of their leashes, pulling this old man towards the comfortable house where his wife would have vodka and supper waiting. She had said, my Hinny, when we returned from the privacy of our South Sea Islands, that the stairs would keep away those visitors who were not really eager to see us. And I had said, fine; they would be the only exercise I should have time for in New York while writing that novel.

Now I plodded up them, cursing them and dreaming wistfully of the energy I had been cheerfully expending for the last fourteen years, trailing folklore across the world, into the jungles of the South Pacific, the deserts of Africa, the granite crags of the Near East. A couple of books had come of it, and some odd adventures for a wheezing stair-

climber to marvel at. But it's the spirit that counts, I thought, as the aged always do. By golly just give me a week with fresh air and sleep in it, and I could be diving for pearls again.

Hinny opened the door for me so that I wouldn't have to make the effort.

"Hi! The Hollywood contract has come!"

Ah, yes, the Hollywood contract. How nice. There would be money and a desk at Culver City, parties and a paunch. We would be driving west within the week.

"Do you want to answer the 'phone, or shall I?" said she. "They'll hang up if you don't hurry."

I took the cold vodka with me. "Hello?"

"Hassoldt Davis? Dave? Armand Denis speaking."

"Good God; Armand!"

"Listen, I'm in a rush. About to leave on a new expedition. I'd like to talk to you. May I come up?"

"Sure, I'd love to see you, but . . ."

"So long . . ."

It was not ten minutes later that Armand arrived, four steps at a time up five flights of stairs. He had changed very little since I saw him last, ten years ago in Bali before the tourists got there, making with his father-in-law, André Roosevelt, and his wife, Leila, that first fine film of native life called "Goono Goona" here, and "Kris" in Europe. Six feet four he was, lean and hard in body as he was in wit, a scientist, an explorer, a soldier, a monk, at various times in his strange career. He had directed the moving picture of one of Frank Buck's expeditions, and recently produced two of his own, "Wheels Across Africa" and "Dark Rapture," the latter acclaimed the finest travel film ever made. His wife, the former Leila Roosevelt, had gone on all the expeditions except Buck's; while Armand was away on that one she upped and drove a truck around the world.

They were an amazing pair, and complemented each other perfectly. Organization and execution, emotional instinct and

scientific analysis, a flair for the fare of the intellectuals and equally that of the simple public, courage and perseverance—these were intricately blended in the amalgam of Leila and Armand. I had noted years ago that Leila's pockets were always bulging with cigarettes and never a match, that Armand's were stuffed with matches and never a cigarette. They were a perfect co-operative.

Now Armand was explaining that the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition was about to leave for the other side of my comfortable world, for Burma, China, Tibet, India, and Africa, to produce a film which should surpass "Dark Rapture" both in hazardous adventure and scientific interest. Would I care to come along? There might be a book in it for me; I could take the still photographs; and said Armand with what looked like a leer, I could entertain the natives, performing magic for them or pretending lunacy at the drop of a topi, so that they would stare at me and not the lens.

"But look here," I protested, "I can't! There's this Hollywood business. There's the contract on the piano . . ."

"Think about it, and decide by to-morrow. Nine a.m."

Whistle! and he was gone. Down the banisters probably.

I joined. Hanny packed my suitcases—we must travel light—by a method which I never could duplicate during the ten months of the expedition.

I met the two other members, Leroy G. Phelps and John Kenney. Roy had been cameraman with Armand on several trips already, a quiet fellow, thorough, intrepid. He was to be my tent-mate. Jack, our mechanic, had never been out of the United States, but we were to see him adapt himself as blithely as a chameleon to the strange lands we should explore. Jack's tough Irish fibre and un-Irish disposition were to be our props in many a predicament.

Leila said good-bye to the four children whom I never could believe were really hers, and joined us in New York, as fresh and eager as always. I had met her occasionally during those

years since Bali, and between-whiles learned of her adventures through her father, André (first cousin to old Teddy), with whom I had spent two years in Paris working on "Goono Goona" and "Kris." Leila was to become the only woman explorer I had ever known who could remain sane, attractive, and charming after two weeks in the mud on a diet of cabbage soup.

Our itinerary was complex. Jack and Roy left immediately by ship for Burma taking the three cars, two specially equipped Dodge sedans and a one-ton Dodge truck. Armand and Leila sailed two weeks later for Holland. I was to leave the week after that to join them in Amsterdam and fly with them to Burma. Quentin Young, our guide for China (the lad who with Ruth Harkness captured the Giant Panda), was to come from Hong Kong and meet us all at Rangoon. That we all did meet within the space of sixteen hours should serve as a primary lesson to the collegiate "vagabonds" who would like to be leaders of expeditions when they grow up.

I said good-bye to Maupi and Fella, and that small Hinny. The Atlantic wedged between us. I met Leila and Armand by chance in an Amsterdam theatre.

Like a swallow towed by a thread below us we saw the shadow of our plane. Soon we were above Gooiland of the golden sands and blue-black fir trees, of meadows and moors that were gently swabbed by the clouds beneath us now. The steward obligingly passed out pamphlets which exhorted us to visit the New York World's Fair, an ironic gesture to us who were about to live in the carnival of Asia. Munster, dear to me for its cheese and to the early Anabaptists for the refuge it afforded them, was unrolling 6,000 feet below when I looked out again with the ungrateful thought that I could not have a cigarette for yet another hour. There were great woods here and tilled fields, patterned like samples of linoleum beside forests of plush.

Wooded mountains, the Harz, threw such dense shadows

from their southern slope that I felt no man could live there ; elves perhaps could manage, and gross hump-backed manikins, but these valleys had sucked night into them and could hold no hopeful thing.

Leipzig was ahead, that old city so prosperous with the arts, where Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, and Bach had lived. Its airport careened up to meet us and cold air jammed against our eardrums until the ache of it seemed unendurable, a bar of metal wedged from ear to ear forcing the tympana apart and suddenly hooking them in again. The seven passengers, cigarettes already in hand, de-barked and hurried to the port restaurant, making yawning and chewing motions to get their hearing back. The Dutchman was pointing to his ears and shouting, though no voice reached me, and I gathered that the trouble in his head was "enormous" and that he too was "doof," as his own language so descriptively put it. The Mohammedan looked naïvely pleased with this strange sensuous experience.

We sat down to lunch beneath a louring photograph of Hitler, whose eyes inexorably followed our subversive movements ; still we couldn't go that briny ham. Choking our lungs with sufficient nicotine to last us until the next stop, we crawled into the plane again, "like parasites," said our Mohammedan, "in the tail of a moth," and headed for the Danube, which is less accurately blue than "blonde," as its own people term it. What had once been Czechoslovakia lay athwart one wing, a land of mountains upon which lean castles perched, and pinnacles which held the eyries where, the Hungarians maintained, lived the vampires, which were not native to Hungary at all though their peasants were indeed afflicted by them. Here, in the valleys, the earth was no longer patched in squares as it had been in Germany and Holland ; the living ribbons of crops and the black soil were glued like banners across the mountainsides ; it was a freer landscape billowing towards Hungary and lovely Budapest.

There was no time for more than memories of Budapest when we descended to one of the prodigious snacks the K.L.M. was continually proffering us, then raced up again and headed for the immense Hungarian Plain. But I recalled the pride and buoyancy of those folk who had been so often beset since the days of conquering Rome, and yet could exclaim each new decade, "But look, the old palace is repaired again, now better than ever! And have you seen our baths? our opera? our bridges? We have so very much. The Danube . . . ah . . ." There were cordons of peasant girls linked arm in arm along the gay street called Karoly Karut, singing, with their plump skirts doing dances about them, and laughing from hooded eyes. Old men went strolling with unwieldy long pipes, darting to assist you before you even had time to light your own cigarette.

At night, from the top of that sudden hill on the Buda shore, dodging the wind in the lee of the Citadel Gellert, you looked down upon the towers of Buda and the neatly ordered lights of the modern Pest. The Elizabeth Bridge and the Ferenc Joseph Bridge made graceful sweeps from shore to shore, and there far below was the Royal Castle, and there half-way down was Saint Gellert himself flaunting his bronze crucifix at those malign ghosts who eight centuries ago enclosed him in a nail-studded barrel and dropped him into the Danube.

Most endearing of all was Buda, the old city, where the slim-peaked houses still clung to the hillside; they are demolished now. And most magnificent, more than all the Dürers and the Goyas preserved in Pest, were the police horses, stamping carefully and powerfully, battering invisible assailants with fine tosses of their heads, defending the city that must decline in its own sweet way.

Now the descendants, perhaps, of those same horses were pursuing the shadow of our airship across the Hungarian Plain. The winds grew rougher as we approached Belgrade. Our seats slid beneath us, and long Armand spent his time

being pleated and unpleated like an accordion. We held to safety belts and watched the altimeter registering seven thousand, eleven thousand, thirteen thousand feet, while the mountains of Yugoslavia pushed up mightily on every side.

The clouds far below divided the great Vardar River into quicksilver pellets as we followed it into Greece. There were the Macedonian mountains, streaked with snow that was golden in the sunset. The earth seemed richer in the occasional patches where it was ploughed, but most of the successive hills were wilderness; none but the ghosts of the old gay god frequented them now; and Zeus on Olympus, just over there, would be watching us bitterly, I thought. We were vaulting at his own level the Vale of Tempe. We were staring like tourists at the postcard panorama of Thessaly, which centaurs had inhabited long ago.

"Athens," said the steward, corsetting me maternally into my lifebelt; and we descended amidst soft hills to the customs shed.

The Greek would not smile as he examined our baggage; life was real and life was earnest now that those rampageous gods were gone. He didn't care about the rum in my suitcase, nor our load of cameras, nor even what was in our Mohammedan's mind. It was only money that concerned him vitally. We could bring it in when the sum of it was duly recorded, but we could take no Greek money out.

The road from the airport to Athens and the glory that once was Greece was a shabby runnel now, lighted in the dusk by poppies, but shadowed fitfully by decrepit cafés and donkeys tottering beneath Herculean loads. There were thistles nodding wearily and slender shafts of wheat. The leaves of grapes sprawled one upon another until to-morrow's sun should flog them to their dutiful growth again.

Athens was tired, and its spirit infected us so that even the powerful honey from Hymettus, the Thessalian wine, and the tart cherries of Volo could rouse no more wonder in us than

what was required to see the Acropolis on a half-moon-lighted night. There was no weariness here, the Parthenon of Pericles and Phidias still stood vital above the sabotage which the Persians, Romans, and Christians had successively wrought; it was independent of time, and the Caryatides supporting the porch roof of the Erechtheion remained unawed by the nether electric stars and the mechanical clamour rising from the valleys at their feet.

It was good to remember this permanent beauty, dedicated though it had been to transient gods, when next morning we flew towards Africa and the fabulous isles; Tynos, Mykonos, Syra, Naxos, where Ariadne was abandoned, and twisted Amorgos, floating in waters of peacock green as their shores shelved into the Ægean.

Alexandria, once Cleopatra's capital, seemed shrunken against the blighted sands when we reached its airport finally. There was an hour to wait, and Armand determined that the only way to discover his mislaid cablegram was for us to drive to the city in search of it. The chequerboard pattern of the streets, laid out by the Ptolemies two thousand years ago, was obvious where the sharp right angles of modern seven- and eight-storey buildings impinged upon the soft contours of the native sections.

The eyes of Egypt examined us critically as we passed, the blackest eyes in all the world above the women's nose-high veils. There was nothing to be learned from them of the faces beneath; no dreams shone through. Those eyes that walked the twisted *charehs* of Egypt, that walked into you and through you, leaving conundrums like pulses throbbing in your raw New World brain, these had confounded Tyre and Carthage and sent exalted tradesmen to them.

Since there is no water in Arab-town, it must be bought by the jugful from the carters who screech to the crooked windows high above. The Arab knows no street names in his own quarter, but only the various street widths, very few of them

alike. Thus what is called the Chareh-el-Bey by Europeans is called by the Arabs "The Three Metre Street."

It was here I sat, sipping anisette *zib-bib*, while Armand beleaguered the telegraph folk. French photographs, shoe-strings, hoochie-coochie invitations, canes, lottery tickets, amber beads, and aphrodisiacs were offered me at half-price by every beggar in the neighbourhood.

A group of black Sudanese with three parallel scars on each cheek sat upon the bar rail playing grotesque instruments for an Egyptian girl, veiled and faceless, who danced.

An old woman, dressed in black walked round and round a lamp-post, holding three amazingly white eggs in her umber hands.

An old man sat cross-legged upon the mat which he was weaving, slipping the strips of straw deftly in and out and occasionally unsnarling his beard from them, chanting as he worked, with a slight, rhythmic bouncing, his fingers like horny lizards among the straw.

An Arab boy leaned sleepily against a bariel, tootling a reed flute to a flock of turkeys that sought and pecked refuse from the littered alley.

Another child tumbled loosely from a fourth-storey window opposite my café, and two men laboured for half an hour swabbing him from the pavement. He had looked like an idiot, I remembered. When the third consecutive *zib-bib* thereafter tasted like *cervelles au beurre noir*, I set out to meet Armand half-way, and gratefully soon was in the plane again, secure against the cruelties of the earth.

We went up quickly, escaping, and time fled with us; the clock beside the altimeter gained forty minutes while we were loosening our safety belts. We looked down on Egypt, bared of mystery from this perspective but for the giant's paint-box beyond Damietta, square pools of earth an acre large containing a dozen liquid colours—dye tanks, perhaps, though there was no habitation between horizons here.

The Sinai Peninsula slowly revolved beneath us as we veered towards Palestine ; the orange groves of Lydda, a quenching greenness, flowed past and we landed in dust again, to lunch amidst a million flies and numerous night-gowned waiters whose primary occupation was to keep us doused from neck to heels with Flit. Lydda was the Lod of Biblical Hebrews, and is Ludd to the Arabs to-day, its only distinctions the airport and the birthplace of that Saint George who did the dragon in.

Our solitary colonial Englishman went poking about with his bludgeon cane at the beautifully carved doorways of the shack where we lunched. He didn't approve of beggars in nightshirts having an art of their own. It was indecent, and our decent Mohammedan with the sultry mind observed suitably that once when a heavy fog settled on the English Channel the London papers had borne the caption, " Continent Isolated ! "

What passed for air in Lydda was thick in our lungs when we took off, but the jets from the plane ventilators revived us enough to let us doze. The Dead Sea and the tangled River Jordan, the Mountains of Moab, the withered lands with their brave oases, led us on to Rutbah Wells, the lone English fort in the Syrian Desert ; and Leila recalled the bones and the stench of rotting flesh during her drive across this waste when she was circling the world by car. And I still was grateful for the sack of inexplicable pretzels which had sheltered me, as I crouched behind it, when in winter I had crossed here in the back seat of a Model T Ford rocking through a mist which reached up just to my waist so that I could see neither the earth nor the low beehive houses, and had almost to dodge the enormous stars.

But now we were over the Euphrates, with the Tigris a few miles south, crawling parched between date palms, ignobly dying on the land where reputedly the Garden of Eden lay. Chaldean Ur and Nineveh and Babylon, those proud capitals, are scarcely scars among the countless later ruins. And the

mud huts of to-day will be ruins a month from now, you would say, comparing the number of occupied dwellings with those recently abandoned. The irrigation of Iraq, systematically destroyed six centuries ago by the Mongols under Hulaka Khan and Tamerlane, has been resumed, but it is still inadequate to support men and cattle and grain throughout this area during the driest season, so the huts are abandoned and new ones built closer to the Euphrates, which are in turn abandoned when water runs through the old lands again.

We were content to see no more of Baghdad than the airport and the swarthy wench who drifted to meet her Englishman on scented waves of heat, for Baghdad of the Caliphs is an abomination now, with little but its goatherds and the circular boats called *gufas* spinning down the Tigris to recall the days of magic and Scheherazade's romance. And the land of the Parthians to the south and east was a wasteland, great though it once had been, with Ctesiphon's arch vaulting drab sands which had borne King Chosroes' carpet of emeralds and pearls.

There was nothing to cast a shadow as the sun set over Basra far ahead, and dimly we saw, six thousand feet down, the swamps, like mirrors of gun metal, and thought of the swamp Arabs, those fiercest of men, going about their businesses. But it was a different world in which we landed next; the Shatt-el-Arab Hotel stood in blocks of light in the desert place that was Basra, famous as the Bassorah of the *Arabian Nights*.

Here was magic to astound old Caliph Omar who founded his city in that year of sorcery, 635. Hot baths flowed in our air-conditioned rooms. We sat on floodlit terraces overlooking the river and the empty desert beyond. We sipped martinis (made with anisette and served with the fish) while a brass orchestra played American songs. And before going to bed early in preparation for our usual rising at 4 a.m., we swam in a modern pool and washed out the taste of it with

Scotch served beneath beach umbrellas to protect us from the torrid moon. The little desert toads were out in legions wherever a lamp made a brilliant pool for them to play in, and the Iraqui urchins, tripping over their shirts, garnered our cigarette butts to feed the poor reptiles who thought them fireflies. We strode on baby toads when we returned to our rooms, and my dreams were peopled with them.

Sinbad had pursued his wonders along the route we followed in the morning, past the isle of Kishm and the peninsula of terrible black rocks with the texture of bat wings called Ras-el-Jebel. We refuelled at Djask on the Iranian coast and rose again in our smouldering plane to follow the bare shores and white lunar mountains of Baluchistan to Karachi, where the Parsees, the fire worshippers, maintain their ritual in a climate which would set salamanders gasping for breath.

This was India, said Armand graciously, but no one cared very much. We lay limp across the great Thar Desert, and were not impressed when we were told by the steward—who was always waking us—that Hyderabad over there was the hottest town on earth. Jodhpur in the dusk was our destination, the capital of Marwar, which means “the land of death.”

Here were a modern aerodrome and a luxurious hotel. We learned that for many years the Government had refused the Maharajah to build this semi-palace, mistrusting the power he already had, and that when consent was finally granted, the Maharajah rebuked the English gently by inviting their officials, in perpetuity, to stop at his hotel as his own guests.

Jodhpur was India, with the squalor of its people and the colossal beauty of its past lying before us as we walked at twilight towards the citadel, beneath a bland full moon. Moustachioed and weak-chinned young Indians, nearly strangled by their high jacket collars, minced by towards inconceivable amours. The colours of individual saris and turbans were hot in the gloaming dusk, yellow and flame, orange and turquoise. Chocolate figures slept on woven

beds before the doors of their huts. A row of feeble lamps ran up a hill past brilliantly lighted cubicles where nude merchants squatted, on stools eye-high, selling minute quantities of spices, betel nut, witching beads, and herbs ; and towering above them was the citadel, another stone-rimmed world.

The skyscrapers of New York seemed flimsy by contrast to this enormous combination of fort and castle, five hundred years old, its walls six miles in circumference and its turrets jabbing at the moon. We trudged up the winding slope which the Rajahs had ridden on elephants to reach their golden halls on top. The fat bastions branched into a filigree of stone when we reached the level of the palace windows, and these were of stone grill work and delicately chiselled by the ancient slaves. Vultures' nests hung from ledges above us, and one gaunt bird climbed with us along the wind, leering hopefully at Leila, who felt near to death from toothache.

Our Mohammedan had persuaded me that the royal bedrooms must be a worthy goal, but they seemed to have lost their glamour when the Maharajah moved to his more modern home. We found multi-concubinal beds beneath stupendous chandeliers which lacked half their crystals, hanging like swords of Damocles above those arenas of love. Plush, bad lithographs, photographs of horses, mirrors so old and wobbly that they looked like carnival devices, dis-articulate armour, gilt cradles suspended like hammocks, exquisite landscapes painted on glass, gargantuan furniture, and a cordless electric fan of heroic size placed smack in the centre of the floor, showed the strange quality of the Maharajah's taste. It was a relief to reach the parapets and fresh air again, to walk those cannoned walls far above the plain. Somewhere a goat was crying like a prisoner, or perhaps the ghost of the man who was walled up alive, for good luck, when the foundation of the citadel was laid. . . .

We walked down the slope on our heels, through scalloped

arches, among elaborate shadows, and so smoothly was this visit blent of the stuff of dreams that there seemed no transition before we were in the plane again next morning, and the sun was rising warped out of the east.

The plane, I thought, was unlike a bird; it was a part of the earth sheared loose, a shaped alloy of the earth's own metals and woods and liquid secretions, torn from the body cruelly and flung as a sacrifice to Time. And if we crashed because the earth wanted her own again, and so drew us down, it would serve us right, who had butchered her, I felt, looking down at the pitiful desert and the rash of huts *en route* to Allahabad. Beyond was Calcutta and the slaughter of goats to appease the thirst of the goddess Kali, and soon we left its clouds behind, the first of the monsoon, and crossed the Bay of Bengal to Burma.

It was another land, for the full monsoon was upon it, splaying its rivers across the fields. The silver snakes of rivers and the aluminium worms of streams started anywhere, wound through valley and pasture land, doubled back upon themselves. Lush hills, the Arakan range, passed first beneath us, then the plains of bright green rice with long villages following the courses of streams diverted for irrigation. Here were the white cones of settlements, familial shrines, and in the distance shone the immense Shwe Dagon.

Older than the Christian church and still aspiring, as new generations add to its great height—it is now higher than St. Paul's Cathedral—the pagoda shines with a god's ransom in gold leaf, pasted fleck upon fleck by the pious whose wishes have been fulfilled at this shrine where eight hairs of Buddha are devotedly preserved. It was the beacon of our destination as it was of thousands each year who made the pilgrimage from India and China and far Tibet, to pray for faith and hope and charity, our same Christian virtues. It passed beneath us, a burning spire of holiness in the sun's last light.

We heeled north to the aerodrome, and the earth pushed

gradually, obliquely towards us ; it wheeled like a drunkard's ceiling ; men seemed suspended by their feet from it, craning their necks to watch us land. We bumped gently and elastically bounced while we righted the world again, then joined it contentedly as one coming home.

"Routine flight," said the pilot, with a smile and a sniff as we said good-bye.

We had descended deaf from heaven, and the drumming of the plane was still in our ears. Faintly above it we could hear the whining obbligato of the car that was bearing us to Rangoon, then a deeper resonance, the tolling of a temple gong. A pyramid of illuminated gold lay ahead of us in the dark, the Shwe Dagon, then the lights of Rangoon City. Our ears clicked, and with the needle of pain which entered them rushed the clear sounds of our own earthen world, and we knew that our journey through time and space, that four days' fantasy, was suddenly done.



2 China Does Not Answer

IT WAS SO damply hot on the hotel verandah that Leila was for a moment unaware of the cup of coffee I had upset in her lap.

"It's refreshing," she said at last.

Armand was hotter still. For a week we had been at the Grand Hotel, the best, we were told, in Rangoon, while he had sought by every conceivable means to confirm our permission to enter China by the Burma Road. The Chinese Embassy at Washington had assured him that Chungking had granted his request and that the necessary documents would be awaiting the expedition at Rangoon. The Chinese Consulate here had no knowledge of them. Mr. T. L. Soong, of

the South-west Transportation Company, which alone controlled the petrol supplies on that military road, was unimpressed. We must wire Dr. Kung, Premier of China, said he, blithely. We had wired without result. We had pulled every string in Rangoon, and they had fallen apart in our hands.

We had shown our official recommendations from the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Cordell Hull, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Belgian Ambassador to the Court of St. James, the Chinese Ambassador in Brussels, as well as personal letters from President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Leila's cousins. We had mentioned the flag of the Explorers Club which, as a signal honour and an index of his integrity, had been presented to Armand. But nothing could apparently be done without the agreement of T. L. Soong and Dr. Kung.

T. L. Soong and Dr. Kung,
Dr. Kung and T. L. Soong.

It became a dirge in our hearts, a prayer for deliverance from the Grand Hotel. Our Chinese interpreter and guide, Quentin Young, who had known many of the official Chinese intimately during his panda hunts, was unable to understand why his country, so eager for foreign sympathy, should first accept and then deny an expedition which could be relied upon, because of the proven sympathy and probity of each of its members, to produce a film record of China at War which should be a powerful influence for help abroad. Quentin held his lean, sensitive face in his hands.

"We are confused," he groaned. "We are so confused."

We were worse than confused. We were frantic with impatience to get our work started, and we were hot as hell.

We dined at the Pegu Club and the Gymkhana Club with Mr. Austin Brady, our admirable Consul, who was exerting every pressure possible to him. Under Leila's supervision

we packed food and equipment into our three stout Dodges. We spent days at the zoo, fanatic animal fanciers that all of us were, and saw the serow, a strange animal which has the head and ears of a donkey, the bristly body of a pig and the feet and hoofs of a goat. This orphaned baby was suckling the breasts of a Burmese woman, just as, not long ago, when the last of the sacred white elephants was young, it was customary for His Holy Majesty, the elephant, to be nursed each morning by a hundred native women who considered their service honorary.

I sought conjurers worthy of film, and found a dog. The streets of Rangoon were verminous with these pariahs, nuzzling at garbage, snapping at your heels, but my poor little bitch with the wiles of the East in her eyes gave me all her heart for the sake of a pat. She followed me to the hotel. She followed, to the horror of the starched colonials, up the stairs to my room where we had gay times together every alternate three days, for I would feed the poor starved ribs of her, wash her and bed her and in the morning lose her in the street half a mile away where we first had met, since I could neither take her on the expedition nor give her away, but three days later, she would always reappear.

Roy tinkered with his cameras, Jack with the cars and the Burmese cheroots, those "whopping big cheroots" of Kipling which were filled with wood chips and wrapped in newspaper, inches of it. "All the news," said Armand, "that's fit to smoke."

He and Leila waited for news from Chungking. Quentin meditated.

At night we wandered among the stalls of Fraser Street where Chinese, Burmese, and East Indians sold abominable junk from Germany and Japan. Rusted tools, flashlights, oleographs, cotton shirts, soda pop, mirrors, combs, coin-silver bracelets, ear-cleaning accessories were sold in open booths surrounding each of the many cinema places. We

wandered desolately amidst this phony Asia grateful for the breeze which came by night, and returned by the pavements of the main streets which now were littered with sleeping bodies. Miles of them sprawled blissfully upon the hard cement, mostly Hindus, sucking stertorously to get the air through their soft beards.

We waited and waited.

When we heard that a Burmese *pué*, a play, was to be given one night on the edge of town we eagerly inquired about it of our Christian native guide. Aaron was discouraging; his mission school had obviously not approved of such frivolity. "I never seen them," said he. "I never had them, I never been there also." But he got us there at last, after Jack's threat of worse than death, and we entered the theatre in the basement of a native hotel which advertised "All Kinds of Eatable Can be Obtainable."

It was a vast room with no stage and no seats. The audience squatted on the earthen floor or upon the mats which could be had for one anña extra. The Buddhist priests, grouped together away from the common mob, stood ready to flee at the first hint of evil. The play was drawing to a close when we arrived. It seemed to be running down, the dancing of the chief actress becoming slower and slower and the banter of her two monkey-like serving-men less proper, I judged, to balance the decline of whatever plot there was. The actors posed and whirled at one end of the long room, separated from their audience by a fenced area where the orchestra made fiendish sounds with bamboo clappers, gongs, oval drums, flutes, and limp, jointed horns with the sound of violins; all the musicians who were not playing wind instruments were leering at the rice-powdered dancer. She would mince towards them with stiff postures, bend forward from the hips in the Cambodian ballet gesture, snap back and seemingly berate the audience which was much more interested in its cheroots. They had reason to be.

The *pwé* was followed by a boxing match, Burmese style, which would put the fear of God into the polite boxers of Madison Square Garden. It differs in various essentials from the European sport ; it is a contest of many men, not a pair ; it is fought to music, with bare fists ; kicking is permitted as in the French *savate*, and there are no fouls.

The six men of each team faced their opponents at a distance of fifteen feet within the roped arena, glaring evilly, flourishing their bare fists and occasionally clapping the cupped palms of their right hands against the V of their bent left arms. It made a surprisingly loud explosion. The orchestra struck a note and the opposing sides rushed together, each man to fight personally with his chosen adversary. Smack, smock, smack, went the bare fists against bare flesh. Crunch, went a knee into a groin.

"B'joozus !" said Jack.

Groonk, went a grenade of knuckles against a nose. Blood spurted, and victor and vanquished immediately left the ring. The referee, a magisterial old Sikh with white flowing beard leaned across his desk at one side of the arena and made a gesture for the orchestra to increase its tempo. The fighters turned cartwheels to catch their opponents with a heel in the jaw. They somersaulted and bounced up with a head in the groin, which seemed the principal point of attack. One man would back away from his enemy, clapping his arm defiantly, then rush in with wild swings of the fist or long fingernails. It was the most brutal public performance I think I have ever seen but the moment blood was drawn that couple left the ring until at last a man of about sixty, as quick as a badger, was left with an adolescent boy.

Clop, smack, clop, grrrnc, the boy's tooth was broken, but he swallowed the blood and continued fighting. The old man was on him with both knees working like pistons. The boy buckled ; the old man got a grip on an ear. They struggled violently while the music rose to a climax. There was a shrill

on the flutes as the ear came half off and the blood of victory jetted.

The decision was given to the team which had scored most in blood.

The next performance was a physical relief after this gory one, for it was *chin-lon*, one of the most graceful and deft of games. Seven young men stood in a loose circle, and at the opening blast of the orchestra one of them flung high into the air a light ball, about four inches in diameter, made of wicker basket-work. It descended to the lifted knee of the thrower where he balanced it astonishingly without using his hands, then up it went again and was caught on a shoulder. The shoulder snapped it to the top of his head, the head to his hip, up to his shoulder again and it was allowed slowly to roll down his back until it dropped and was balanced upon his heel. A kick now sent it to another player, who tossed it up and down and around him with equal dexterity, never touching it with his hands.

The music quickened, the gongs softened as all the players but one moved away from their champion. He tossed a ball of hollow glass almost to the dark ceiling and caught it without even a sound of impact upon his head, up it went and down to his knee, down farther, rolling along his shin to his foot, from which he propelled it high again, ducking simultaneously, to catch it on one temple. Across the back of his head he rolled it, on to his forehead, and with a little jerk sent that fragile globe spinning to the shoulder of one of his companions, who similarly played with it until he was tired, before passing it on.

This was truly art, a ballet, a blend of acrobatics with dancing accompanied by the weird rhythms of the shadowy orchestra, a sport which held us breathless waiting for the crash of glass. Suddenly we heard it, but it was not the ball. The swinging petrol lantern overhead exploded with fireworks of blazing oil. We darted to the street, plunged in gloom again as we returned

from that vision of mobile beauty to the thought of China's explosions which we were still forbidden to film.

"We'll wait two days longer," said Armand, "then we'll start for China anyway. There is a lot I want to do in Burma, and the permit may be at the border waiting for us."

Patiently we waited. We dined with charming people. We fed sacred fish in the monastery ponds. We sat with Gin Gimlets, which have the effect of their name, in the native cafés and gazed gloomily at the twinkling silver rings on the sturdy toes of the waiters. And on the night before we were to leave, permits or no, we drove restlessly to see the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the most venerable place of worship in all the Indo-Chinese lands.

The golden cone, three hundred and seventy feet in height, was illuminated by spotlights which the wealthy and devout had bought, so that it was tremblingly reflected in the Royal Lake below. We removed our shoes respectfully and climbed the cool steps, the many hundreds of them, which approached by a gentle gradient the heart of the shrine. • Vendors of sweets and pretzels and crisp pancakes, of flowers for offerings, and little brass gongs, for calling Buddha's attention, squatted along the way. A blind beggar sat in a circle of scarlet stains—the spoor of the betel-nut addict—and by the light of lanterns behind him the merchant of this friendly drug sold chunks of it upon a copper tray, with the leaves to envelop it arranged in concentric circles and scattered with rose-petals. A leper limped along beside us, whining from a grey muzzle like a dog; priests in saffron robes preceded us, and a shaven nun in magenta surplice sought to insure us merit hereafter by inducing us to give her alms.

A great resonance, faint at first like a pulse of the blood, filled the night as we climbed, the stroking and the beating of the many bells with which the pilgrims asserted their prayers. We reached the flagged platform around the plinth of the pagoda, and there, in the low shadow completely encircling

some caravan we made, I thought, though a little too shiny still ; the three cars looked sleek and powerful, matter-of-fact, modest with the small lettering of the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition on their sides. Each had a platform on top with a hatch leading to it. The back seats of the sedans had been removed to make room for baggage, and the truck was equipped with food and tool compartments running the length of each side.

Armand honked his horn twice ; I honked mine ; Jack replied. We were off. There was a sudden warmth in the pit of my stomach such as the first cocktail leaves.

We wound through the streets of Rangoon, driving unaccustomedly on the left side of the road, I praying to Buddha that I shouldn't see my starveling dog. We followed the Promé Road north, more or less paralleling the great Irawadi River where the flying fishes never play. It was flat country, monotonously flat and green, a two-dimensional landscape of paddy-fields stretching to the horizon on every side. Occasionally there was a tree, which Roy saluted on his harmonica by playing dismally Joyce Kilmer's pæan to it. That, I thought, was an undiplomatic beginning for a man who scarcely knew the companion with whom he was to ride and live for the next nine months. His limericks were considerably better.

As we worked farther north the land became more varied, ridges of red laterite breaking through the green, and areas of dwarfed, dark green jungle. For the first several nights we slept in the resthouses of the Public Works Department. These were unfurnished except for a table and chairs. We supplied our own cots and lights, cooked our own food on a petrol stove, and paid generally two rupees, about seventy-two cents apiece, for the shelter and the services of a *mali*, or houseboy, whose duties were most coprological.

It was at our first resthouse near Tharawadi that we encountered what the British call a Civil Servant—this one was

a surveyor, though he looked like a painless dentist, goatce and all—and his personal *mali* who endeared themselves to my memory.

The surveyor, he told me, had for years been travelling around Burma with two inseparable adjuncts, his adoring *mali* and what he termed his “utensil,” which was of a sanitary nature. This utensil had been given him by an old-fashioned but practical aunt who had acquired as a girl that lost art, so popular in the nineteenth century, of painting flowers on china. She had given her nephew the utensil when he left England for the East, a handsome utensil decorated with rosebuds done by her own dainty hand. “You can’t tell what you’ll find out there,” she had said shyly. “I’d never trust a heathen.”

So he took the utensil with him, took it everywhere, for in the first place he was sentimental and in the second practical like his aunt. Into the deepest jungles he packed it, and if ever he seemed about to forget it the *mali* would chide him with a look and pack it carefully in his own luggage. The *mali* cherished it more than the master finally. He would polish it till it glistened; not a finger-print could smirch it; and he would never allow the shadow of a native or of himself to fall across it, for fear of the black magic which would thus occur. He held it at arm’s length always, to the eye of the sun.

“But you know,” said the surveyor, “there came a time when I was troubled with, ah, what you might call an irregularity, which, ah, discomfited me considerably. Beastly nuisance, you know. We were in Tenasserim near the Siamese border, barbarous country; very few horses, actually, and I had to walk, you know. The, ah, irregularity continued for several days, as somehow I’d overlooked bringing along a specific for this sort of thing. *Mali* grew gloomier and gloomier, and every time I’d stop for a moment to smoke or to look around, there I would see the utensil twinkling at me, from behind some tree. You know, I got to hate it! I dreamed of it, by Jove, of its purer-than-thou white china and

its simpering little rosebuds. My irregularity continued. I grew desperate, and my faithful *mali* was also in despair. It was on the seventh day just after sunrise that I came from my tent and saw the most astounding thing. There, by Jove, stood the *mali* with the utensil in his hand, and he was spitting in it! It was incredible but there he was spitting and spitting into it, cursing it terribly, smacking it with his palms, my faithful *mali* who had always honoured it and would not even let a shadow sully the thing. Now he had his back to the sun, so that his shadow covered it, and suddenly he began running with it into the shadow of the trees. He collected shadows in it, by Jove, and he spat upon each one of them. I went up to him quietly and took the utensil from his trembling hands. Then I spat in it too, and with a great yell I flung it into the river. Away and away it floated until it was out of sight. I smiled at the *mali* and the *mali* smiled at me, for at that very moment, you may believe me or not, I felt my trouble to be at an end."

We drove slowly northwards, away from the highroad and the resthouses now, to film the life of the natives who had not been influenced by Rangoon and Mandalay. We came to Kyaukpañgaung and then to Mount Popa, the home of the most powerful *nats*—good and evil spirits—in Burma. In a great dark valley there was a river, the natives said, which flowed uphill as a sort of escalator for the lazy water *nats*, but it would not flow uphill for us, whose vision of fairyland had been dimmed very long ago. There was a cave here with Buddhas and relics to which offerings were made, and a wandering path leading from it to a promontory where a pagoda and its monastery were perched high above the plains.

As we drove on we were filled with the peace of Burma, a kindly land, we thought, with a religion even gentler than Christianity. We were beginning to believe that Burma was almost too peaceful for the purpose of our film, when we came to the *chaung*, or ford, on one of the branches of the Irawadi.

It was evening, and the rain was slapping like bullets at our windshields. Armand was riding with Roy and me to discuss certain sequences of the film.

"We had better test that sand," he said, "though it looks safe enough."

I walked half-way across the river, following the stakes which had been placed in it by the Public Works Department, as the P.W.D. upon them indicated. The wet sand seemed firm enough.

"It's all right," I said. Armand took the wheel and Roy and I climbed on to the roof for a better view through the howling storm. We could scarcely see the woods of the farther shore.

We started across confidently, following the markers. We had reached the middle of the river when I heard the engine racing and saw with horror that we were not going forward at all. One side of the car began to settle.

"Hell! It's quicksand!" Armand yelled. Something like cold quicksand ran down my spine. Armand tried vainly to back the car, to rock it, but we only settled deeper. I shielded my eyes to see the farther shore. There, placidly watching us, was a group of Karen men.

We shouted at them. They simply stared.

"They must have buffaloes," said Roy.

I shouted again. I offered fifty rupees if they would pull us out.

Armand shoved up an oil-funnel. "Try this! Offer them a hundred!"

Using the funnel as a megaphone we offered a hundred, but the Karens remained squatting on the shore. Lightning without thunder tore gashes in the sky, making them look like lavender ghosts.

"By God, they're wreckers!" Armand gritted. "They're going to let us sink!" That, obviously, was what they were going to do. The rain could not hurt their naked hides.

They could wait patiently. What a bloody ass I had been, I thought, not to have followed the markers all the way across the river. They must have been deliberately misplaced for the purpose of entrapping cars.

"Two hundred rupees!" I shouted through the funnel. I knew my accent was formidable, but they must have understood, for three of them simply shrugged and stretched out at full length in the shelter of a lean-to, puffing gigantic cheroots into brass pots to protect them from the rain.

"Three hundred!" Roy yelled in both Burmese and English. The rain drove horizontally at our throats. The water came snaking through the sands beneath us, sliding from wheel to wheel, forming little pools here and there and spreading bright tentacles from one to another. The river was rising with the storm, and we knew that unless we escaped in the next few minutes the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition would disappear without a trace right here. Perhaps I should get a magnesium shot of this, I thought; seal the film back in its metal container and let it drift downstream. Posthumous pictures were better than none. By now I could scarcely see for the rain stung and blurred my eyes.

Armand's long arm came shooting up through the dark and flailed about furiously as he yelled, "Make it three fifty, the b——, the bandits!"

Roy trumpeted through the funnel again. I slid to the running board. Wet sand ground beneath my feet and I knew that we were sinking faster into it.

"Four hundred!" I yelled desperately, as it occurred to me that that was cheap for the chance to live.

"Five hundred!" Leila shouted from the car behind, but her voice barely reached me. Then we were all shouting at once, clinging to the sides of the cars like rats. And suddenly, in a splotch of lightning, we saw a strange figure standing amidst the Karens ashore.

It was nude except for a loin cloth and a feathered war

bonnet which was considerably wilted by the rain. This was incredible, I thought; an American Indian, in costume, in Burma? He raised his hand dramatically, and the natives edged away when his voice boomed out to us:

"Who are you?"

Armand recovered first. "Listen! Five hundred rupees! . . ." I felt the car lurch farther into the sands. "If you get us out of this! . . . Who are we? . . . Armand Denis . . . Leila Roosevelt . . . What diff . . . Americans, God damn it!"

The Indian, or whatever he was, bawled orders to the Karens; lightning slapped across them, and we saw them dragging wide planks with which to make a bridge over the quicksands. They slid out on their bellies and tied a coconut fibre rope to our car, then noosed it around the chests of three buffaloes with which obviously they were accustomed to pull out cars, just like this, when their owners could pay handsomely for towage.

When Leila's car and Jack's truck were safely ashore Armand strode up belligerently to the Indian. "Now, who the devil are you? If you don't mind my saying so, you look damn silly in that masquerade!"

"Me? Chief Michael Joseph Thunderface," said the Indian promptly. "California Mission College, '21. Indian. This isn't a masquerade; it's my forefathers' feathers. It scares people." He grinned broadly.

The man was mad, I thought, but we certainly had better humour him.

"I've hunted with Indians," said Jack "and he looks all right to me. Say, have you got a smoke on you?"

Thunderface grunted in the best Indian manner, and led us to the second incongruous apparition of the night, a typical canvas wigwam in the centre of a group of huts. Buffalo and bear were painted on the walls of it, and through the opening at the top a thick column of smoke mushroomed against the

rain. It was immaculate inside, cosy and warm with the small fire ascending straight. We sat on hides while Thunderface carefully dried his forefathers' feathers, one by one, then wrapped the bonnet lovingly in a soft deerskin envelope.

"Here's your smoke," he said, offering Burmese cheroots which only Jack was man enough to accept. Armand looked as though he still were thinking of those five hundred rupees.

"You're Mr. Denis?" Thunderface smiled at him. "Forget the money. I don't run a racket like that, and since I've been headman of this village the men have done much less of it. Anyway, you're Americans."

We blinked at one another, and Thunderface explained. He had travelled through India with his own Wild West Show some ten years ago, and bad luck had progressively befallen him. First he had had to sell his horses, then one by one his troop had slipped away, and finally, when his wife and daughter died of cholera in Central India he had come to Burma to train boxers and race-horses. This venture had failed, so with a bag of amateur conjuring apparatus he had worked north from Rangoon, shopping for a village worthy of him, until he found it here and after various vicissitudes became its headman. Unlike a European gone native, however, he had lost none of his racial or moral pride. He was a Chief in his own right, and the only true American in Burma, as the long-expired passport he showed us proved.

"And you're one of the Roosevelts," he said to Leila. "That's pretty good. What's this exhibition of yours trying to do out here?"

"We are looking," Armand replied, declining another cheroot, "for good adventure material of some cultural interest. There must be plenty of it in Burma. Now if you could only direct us to the Hill of the Sacred Snakes . . ."

"You mean serpents?" asked Thunderface.

"Snakes," said Armand, who dislikes a quibble. "The snake, specifically, called the King Cobra or Hamadryad, or,

sometimes, Ophiophagus, because it eats its own kind. There's a legend, you know, and old Hurston, the missionary, claimed to have visited the sacred hill where the snakes were worshipped. Oddly enough, I met his son on a train in England, and first heard the story from him."

Thunderface was adamant. "If they're cobras they're serpents. Serpents is to snakes like trousers is to pants. They're higher class."

While we were assimilating this aphorism the sound of temple bells a long way off came tinkling to us. That meant the rain had stopped.

"I've heard that story," said Thunderface, "but I never believed it. They tell me the Naga business died out in Burma a thousand years ago. Still there are two old temples, which they call snake temples, at the dead city of Pagan. There's always a monk hanging around them, and he might know. The rain has stopped now. I'll go with you if you like."

We jumped at the chance. Pagan was only a few miles away. We had had no supper and were exhausted by the struggle with the quicksand, but here was the most likely lead to the sacred hill that we yet had had. We set off immediately for Pagan, the city of the dead.



The Dead City and the 4 Hiccuping Gods

THUNDERFACE RODE WITH us, befouling the night with his cheroot, blowing embers like comets from it, while I told him the little we knew of the ancient snake cult and the lost mountain, or hill, which was still, reputedly, devoted to it. The Naga, the sacred serpent, is revered from India to the Malay Archipelago, but its worship in Burma was very brief,

and it came as news to me that there still existed Naga temples at Pagan. The sacred snake mountain, mythical perhaps, had attracted us like pilgrims rather than professional moving picture producers, and after sifting and collating the various legends current it seemed that our chances of testing them were pretty fair.

Most credible of all reports was that of Hurston, a hundred years ago, who visited the animist tribes at the foot of a bare black mountain near "Kensi" in the hope of converting them. He described a narrow, serpentine stairway which apparently wound up the pinnacle but which he was forbidden to approach. Other investigators, chiefly military men on holiday, sought to identify the district from Hurston's scant notes, but they met with such hostility on the part of the natives, who admitted the legend but refused guidance, that they never got even as far as Hurston's "Kensi."

"Look," said Thunderface, "the old city, Pagan."

Bleached as bones beneath the moon ahead of us lay the ruins of what had once been Burma's capital city, five thousand stupas, pagodas, temples dating from A.D. 108 and spread over a hundred square miles. We stopped the cars and put off the lights. I felt cold before such desolation. A fruit bat, as big as a movie vampire, lumbered across the sky. A jackal nuzzled what at first I took to be the whitened leg of a man, but it was that of an old god only, torn from some alabaster idol. As far as we could see in that greenish light stood the crumbled ruins of brick and marble, littering the jungle with holiness. Something was watching me, I felt, and turned to meet the leer of a griffon on a stone pillar beside the car.

Thunderface, the stoic redskin, grunted, "I like it better in the day."

So do I, I thought. Armand's horn blasted like a fiend ahead of us, and I started the car again, wondering if he had made that noise because the silence of the dead land had become intolerable.

Even the great lost cities of Indo-China cannot boast the multitude of stately ruins that is found at Pagan; and Jerusalem, Rome, Kiev, Benares, have none of them so many temples, or temples of such lavish design. The walled city of Pagan was built in A.D. 847 and by A.D. 1284 had extended its empire from the Gulf of Martaban to the border of Southern China and from the Bay of Bengal to Cambodia. Most of the temples were built between A.D. 1057 and A.D. 1284 between the reigns of Anawrata and Tayokpye Min ("The King who fled from the Chinese"). During the reign of the latter it seems that a Chinese ambassador was maltreated at Pagan, which gave Kublai Khan just the opportunity he had been waiting for. He sent Burmese Shans to seize Pagan for China, promising all the booty of the capital to the mercenaries. The empire was overthrown without too much trouble, but there was no booty left in Pagan itself for the King had got wind of the invasion, moved everything of value and dismantled one thousand large temples, one thousand smaller ones, and four thousand square temples to obtain material for building a strong fortification across the line of march. This impious destruction was only halted when the King discovered a prophecy of doom under a particularly sacred shrine. Terrified, he fled to the south, leaving his empire to become a dependency of China for a number of years.

It is interesting to note that Marco Polo, whose yarns, taken down by a prison mate, are often discredited, described Mien, or Pagan, as "a great and noble city, the head of the kingdom," and was impressed by its towers "built in pyramid fashion." These are certainly the Pagan pagodas, for "upon the top, round about the balls many little gold and silver bells were hung, which at the blowing of the wind, gave a certain sound."

It is said that in the days of Pagan's glory the pagodas and shrines and monasteries could be counted by the myriad; even now the remains of five thousand can still be traced. The ground is so thickly studded with them that you can scarcely

move a foot without touching some sacred object made by the adroit hands of the Paganese. The old but still valuable work of Yule, *The Mission to Avam* lists the variety of these decrepit shrines: "The bell-shaped pyramid of dead brickwork; the same raised over a square or octagonal cell containing an image of the Buddha";—we saw several of these, the roofs fallen off, the intact Buddhas looking as though they were sitting in their baths—"the bluff, knob-like dome of the Ceylon Dagobats, with the square cap which seems to have characterized the most ancient Buddhist chaityas, as represented in the sculptures at Sanchi, and in the ancient model pagodas found near Buddhist remains in India; the fantastic *bu-paya*, or pumpkin pagoda, which seemed rather like a fragment of what we might conceive the architecture of the moon than anything terrestrial, and many variations on these types. But the predominant and characteristic form is that of the cruciform vaulted temple."

The temples of Ananda, Ta-pyi-nyu, and Gawdapalin are of this type, powerful and graceful structures amidst that graveyard of temple bones. Around them gradually rise—as far as we could see by moonlight—wasted towers, terraced shrines of ethereal fretwork, huge bulbous onions of architecture through which jackals slink to disappear in their cores and appear again, like worms burrowing. So thin are the alabaster walls, striated with shadow, that they truly do resemble the skins of an onion, through which you can almost see, layer within layer, the Buddhas enshrined. Leogryphs stand stalwartly above the debris of their crumbled temples. Crippled Gautamas of all sizes lie splashed by the droppings of the magical mango tree. Great arches lead nowhere, like the Arc de Triomphe and its fellow in Washington Square to-day. Dragons lie disarticulate, vertebra from vertebra sundered, whiskers limp and dead as ancient roots, teeth spread helter-skelter like the seeds of Cadmus waiting forever for the new culture of Pagan to water them.

The cart road we followed led down to the Irawadi River, then back for a mile through clumps of tamarinds to two temples which were set alone on marshy ground. There was movement on the truncated top of the smaller, vultures waiting, and at the pagoda's edge shone the vertical eyes of a dying goat.

These two ruins had once been the Nagayon Pagoda and the Aveyadana Temple, built by King Kyansittha in A.D. 1084, to commemorate a time when, as only a servant of the previous king, he had had to flee the royal displeasure. No one knows why. But he fled to the jungle and there a cobra, the great Naga itself, shielded him from the storm with its hood.

Thunderface called softly at the temple door and a saffron-robed old priest came out with a taper. Holding it close to one eye, as if its flame were a lens, he examined us suspiciously, sighed and ran a lean hand across his shaven head. He accepted a cheroot and we sat talking there, winding our words through devious paths until we could state our errand.

Did he know the village that was once called Kensi? Was Naga-worship still practised there?

Fear and cunning showed in the old man's eyes and he turned them quickly away towards the Nagayon Pagoda, the dead shrine of a cult that was dead—perhaps. There was something snakelike in that quick, ancient, shaven head. He could be descended, I thought, from those Tantric priests, the *Ari*, who had come from Bengal through Assam and Manipur, bringing their unclean worship and their *Jus Primæ Noctis*.

But his face was candid, bland with kindness, when he turned it back. Secrecy didn't matter any more, he said, since the cult was formally dead in Burma. We must go to Kya Lap Sing, the Black Valley or Valley of Night, where we should find what remnants there were.

That night we slept in the resthouse which had been built for Edward the Seventh's visit, an arc of a place with triple *punkahs* in every room—vast curtains hung from the ceiling

and swung by coolies to ruffle the torpid air. My mouldy bed fell apart in the night, and when I wakened in the toils of the mosquito netting there came distinctly from the cook-shack the sound of vertebræ rattling and of laughter. We filmed Pagan at dawn, scarcely a moving picture, and headed west with Thunderface who seemed glad of this respite from salvaging cars.



5 The Trail of the Tattooed

THE KYA LAP SING, the Black Valley or Valley-Night, lay somewhere between the great Salween River and one of its tributaries, according to Thunderface, but the tributary varied continually as the natives along the way informed or misinformed us. All we could ascertain was that it was close to the Siamese border. The roads grew worse. We bounced over cyclopean boulders and crawled through mud like mucilage. Leeches clung to us whenever we left the cars, and each night we burned them from each other's bodies.

We were in none too good a humour when we camped one night near the village of Tounbyoung at the foot of a jungly hill. We had been filming the aboriginal Burmese of the district, the shy, long-haired forest folk who still hunted with a pellet bow. This strange weapon consisted of an arched bamboo to the ends of which were attached not one thong but two, with a square of leather about an inch in diameter sewn in the middle of them. The pellet of clay was projected from this leather patch with marvellous accuracy by the natives, and with such precision by me that three times I drove it square upon the same joint of my left thumb.

The mosquitoes were terrible, but even their droning could not keep us awake when we went early to bed that night.

It must have been towards morning that I became conscious of an unpleasant sound vibrating through my dreams. I opened my eyes and at first could see only the white blur of the mosquito net, twisting like ectoplasm in the hot wet wind. My blanket was in ridges beneath me. My cheek throbbed with the bites of mosquitoes—anopheles, probably—that had found their way beneath the loosened net. Gradually I could see that Roy in the other cot was up on an elbow listening as I was. His voice came to me in a whisper:

“That groaning will drive me crazy. I haven’t slept a wink.”

“Nor have I.”

We listened. My elbow began to tremble with the strain upon it, and I sat up, throwing back the net so I could see the clear pattern of bamboo and palm beyond the tent, and the tropical constellations tattooed in silver across the sky. The groaning ghost did not appear. It had stopped for a moment, and again I was aware of the lovely tinkling of pagoda bells near by, the countless little bells suspended from the *hti* or iron parasol at the peak of the temple, ring beneath ring of them, to sing to Buddha in the slightest wind. They sounded at this distance like the pendant glass chimes hung in Chinese doorways or miniature xylophones—like the children’s gamelans of Bali.

Then the groaning began again, not a hundred feet away, and the melody of the temple bells was drowned by it. It was a long, hearty groan that shook the marrow of us.

“Come on,” said Roy. “We’ve got to find out about this.”

We pulled on pants and shirts, and walked cautiously past the other tents towards the group of native huts. There was a light in one of them. A candle illuminated a small alabaster image of Buddha on a shelf. The shadow cast by it spread like an umbrella across the thatched ceiling and descended to the head of a boy lying naked on the floor. He was unconscious, but his groans came mightily as the youths surrounding him massaged his body with oil.

We waited quietly in the door until we were asked to enter. We stood over the boy and looked upon him with horror for his body was scarified with the fresh incisions of blue and red tattooing. From knees to waist there had been designed upon him an intricate web of lines, forming beasts and cabalistic characters, which in the mass suggested perfectly a pair of short blue trousers ; and the cross-hatched red welts upon his chest, with the letters of the Burmese alphabet within them, resembled nothing so much as a crossword puzzle. Three of the cuts were suppurating and all were inflamed.

"Listen," said one of the youths, bending over his friend, "if you scratch yourself you will spoil this beautiful design. Lie quietly."

Another bent down. "You wiggle too much. Are you a little boy, then, and not a man?"

It was simple to guess what Roy was thinking. We knew that Burmese tattooing, like the smoking of gigantic cheroots, was a custom unequalled in popularity by any other people in the world, but so far we had seen little of it, for we were still too close to civilized Rangoon. And as it was to film the indigenous customs of the people that we had come on this expedition, this looked like an excellent scene for us, modified, of course, to the requirements of the critical Hays office.

I spoke to one of the attendant youths. "Would it be possible for us to see this done? Are there other men, exceptionally well tattooed, in the village of Tounghbyoung?"

The boy poured more oil upon his friend's body and gently rubbed it in. "There are, sahib, but we are not really expert here. The tattooing is better as you go north. Go to the Shan States where every man and boy is tattooed all over. The best *saya* in the world lives up there somewhere, the *Saya Maung* whose special emblem is the dancing *nat*."

A *saya* was a tattooer, I already knew ; a *nat* was a spirit.

"Can you tell us how to find him?"

"Sahib, none here can tell you that. He lives on an island

in a lake, they say. But it is far. The best way to find him is to look for the tattoo mark of the *nat* upon the people as you travel north, and ask them where he lives. And as you come nearer the lake, they say, you will meet men with more and more of these dancing *nats* upon them, so you will know you are going in the right way."

The tattooed youngster groaned again, twisting as the pain shot from symbol to symbol on his poor drugged body. We returned to camp and bed, excited at the thought of this strange quest.

Armand and Leila were as eager as we to add the chapter on Burmese tattooing to their most ambitious film. The trail of the tattooed and the tattooer looked very promising, so long as it did not lead us too far from our most important objective, the hill of the snake.

Thunderface was uninterested, however. He wanted to see those there "serpents" as soon as possible, and only grudgingly admitted that there could be anything of interest on the way.

"Of course there's Yenang-yaung," said he, "but you passed that because you stuck to the jungle roads. And there's Minbu and Magué, but you passed them too."

As Armand felt that before proceeding it would be wise to study thoroughly one district of Burma we spiralled centripetally around both sides of the Irawadi towards the centre where Yenang-yaung and Magué lay a few miles apart. The natives of this country would thus serve more or less as a standard to which we might compare the odd tribes we should meet later on.

We followed a road which had ingeniously been paved with blocks of petrified wood into Yenang-yaung, the heart of Burma's vast oil industry. Superficially it appeared like any tract of oil land in our own South-west. The Burma Oil Company owned most of it, and it was in this area that there arose the strikes which had terrified all of lower Burma in the

spring of 1939, when *dabs* flashed nightly even in the streets of Rangoon when the wives of the strikers stopped trains and automobile traffic by flinging themselves in masses of hundreds across the approaches to the oil fields, inviting death at the hands of their white tyrants. It had been the *pongvis*, the priests, who had fostered the strike, we were told. They are the only trespassers who cannot by law be kept out of the fields, and in consequence can easily foment trouble among the workers.

It was not the modern wells that interested us here, but the primitive wells which the natives dug by hand amidst that forest of drills and derricks. Each year the Government gives plots of oil land to Burmese civil servants who have been especially deserving, and these are worked in the same way as a hundred years ago, before the white man cadged the earth from its owners. The natives chisel the wells by hand to depths of five and six hundred feet, arduously chipping the hard soil at the spot where a mirror at the top of the well reflects the sun upon it. A man dressed in a home-made diving helmet is let down by a rope over a windlass to dip the oil into bamboo buckets, a painful and short-lived job, for the gases of the well are noxious and leak into the helmet whenever the workers at the pump forget their duty in conversation.

The glistening black lizard of a man whom we filmed at this operation emerged gasping from the well, wearily put his hands together in thanks to the gods for his safe return, and lay down with his mouth pressed against the earth. We rolled him over gently, poured our canteens upon his harassed face, and slowly revived in him sufficient strength to rub the oil from his emaciated body with sand. He stared at the sun and sighed, his eyes lighting with life again, for he had visited the greasy demons who lived far beneath the earth, and returned to the sun in safety.

The native of nowadays distrusts these demons; they are no longer to be relied upon; they are indiscriminate, vengeful

at the disturbance of those deep unctuous abodes of theirs which have been chosen by the British without regard for their own decisions. The oil land now is by law allotted, whereas in older times it was chosen by themselves. The native who wished to discover the site of oil would then place upon a smooth flat stone the marble image of an elephant surrounding it with gifts of various kinds, and then sit down to watch. If the elephant slipped during a day and a night the direction its trunk pointed indicated the place where borings were to be made ; if it remained still, the gift upon which the sun first cast its morning shadow was marked, and a magician consulted.

Ours was a demonic expedition. We were to live among fiends for eight odd months. Finally we were to meet them with blood in their cold, dead eyes, but immediately we were to know them at Minbu, hiccuping jovially at us.

Minbu, said Thunderface, was a land of great volcanoes, according to the stories he had heard, the burial place of gods, which was enough to send us excitedly to Magué on the western Irawadi shore. From there we crossed to Minbu by a ramshackle ferry which was busy transporting two dacoits, two fierce little boys who had sliced strips from their neighbours, guarded by four formidable Burmese constables who had gone to sleep on the butts of their enormous guns. The boys were handcuffed ; their eyes tore into us like fangs. Armand smiled at them and offered them tinned sausage across the noses of the sleeping guards, but they disdained him.

The volcanoes were huge in the distance, rearing grey cones against a sky which was grey and thick with rain. We slapped leaves apart, broke branches that snapped globules of water back at us, and came at last to our objective.

"Zut !" said Armand, a fine epithet of antique French which is untranslatable.

The volcanoes of Minbu were midgets, scarcely twenty-five feet high. They rose above dwarf scrub, straining their snouts to reach the sky. They were pathetic : you wanted to stroke

and comfort them. We sauntered to the top of the highest, by easy footholds in a clay that was cracked, corrugated, and coloured like elephant hide and viewed the eruption from a distance of four feet. Slowly the tiny crater filled up with a rubbery blister of clay. It stretched, heaved wearily and with a great effort burst, which was evidently such a relief to it that you could hear it sigh as it subsided. The clay erupted was of a texture as smooth as talc, a perfect clay for facial packs, Leila decided.

The volcano seemed harmless enough, ridiculously incompetent, until Armand flung a match, from what he thought a safe distance, at the bursting blister. The explosion and the flame which followed sent us headlong into the arms of Thunderface who was on the way up to join us.

"What you have done," he said, "is worse than spitting in the face of a god. You have lighted matches under his nose."

"God? What god?"

Thunderface hedged. Evidently his mission training in America had been somewhat impaired by living long among the superstitious Burmese. "It's like this," he said at last, and firmly, when we had crossed the river to our cars again. "The story is that long ago when there were lots of gods—you believe in gods, don't you?—there were three gods who were brothers and they all developed the bad habit of eating *kam-saw*, which is fermented rice, very intoxicating. They used to fight and kill people and flirt all over the place, until finally the god who was a sort of sheriff decided to put them in jail. This he did by digging three deep holes at Minbu and putting them inside, and he also gave them enough *kam-saw* to last one thousand years and a day. Then he built these small mountains over them. Well, the sheriff god went off to some other country, and everyone else forgot about them, but they were perfectly happy down there with all that *kam-saw*, and they are still down there, drunk as coots and hiccuping through the tops of their volcanoes, as you have just seen."

Farcical as our visit to the Burmese volcanoes may seem, it was by no means unimportant geologically, for these were the only ones of exactly their sort (with hiccuping gods in them, too) to have been discovered anywhere in the world.

We drove east again, following approximately the Pyeen River where a series of wooden water wheels, seventy-five feet high, irrigated the rice fields on the high banks. Except for the axles of teak they were made entirely of bamboo which had been stripped of its outer skin and soaked for months before being erected in the river. Built without a single nail and balanced so nicely that the slightest current would swoop the water into bamboo buckets and raise it to the irrigation trough, they were a marvellous example of primitive engineering.

The farther we went from the Irawadi, the main route of travel in Burma, the better and brighter became the tattooing of the natives, and bit by bit we learned its history and method and significance. Among the hill people we were entirely dependent upon Thunderface as interpreter, but whatever information he gathered we checked whenever we could with the occasional missionaries—to whom the custom was abominable—and the hard-bitten English veterans of King Thibaw's wars.

Legend claimed that tattooing in Burma originated long ago with a royal edict. A king of Pagan—which means he lived prior to A.D. 1284 when that capital was destroyed—was so distressed by the death of his Number One wife, or *maya-gyi*, that after her cremation (when her salvaged bones had been washed in coconut milk, sealed in a red velvet bag and committed to the Irawadi) he felt night after night the need for solace and found it nowhere among his other wives and concubines. So he sent his Number One father-in-law in quest of this elusive solace, and sometimes it would be discovered by him among the hussies of the bazaar, but more often at the Zat Pwé where the comeliest maidens acted. These the father-in-law would carry off to divert the king.

All Burmese men at that time wore their hair long, as they still do in the jungles, and were skirted with a *longgyi*, which resembles a Javanese sarong with the top ends knotted at the waist. So it is not surprising that the father-in-law, who had been eating pickled tea until he was dizzy, should have brought home a smooth boy by mistake. The king, it is said, was not diverted. He had the eyes of the old pander stitched shut, and decreed that thereafter the men of Pagan should have identifying breeches tattooed upon them so that a modest lift of the *longgyi* would easily disclose their sex.

However it originated, there is scarcely a man of the hills to-day who is not attired in painted pants, scarcely a husband, rather, for the belles of Burma consider bare flanks to be a sign of doubtful manhood, and as the *longgyi* is usually rolled high for the planting of rice or other labours it is impossible to conceal such shame. The Shans go even further than the Burmese, for it is not at all rare to find them tattooed from the ankles to a few inches above the navel—about the height of English trousers, with random figures running clear on up to the nape of the neck and chin. The elect of the ancients were completely clothed in ink, with the exception of the palms and the soles of the feet.

I saw individual designs of many sorts, depending upon whether the tattooed wished mere adornments or magic, but the commonest were those of animals, rows of Buddhas, cabalistic letters and words, and geometrical figures. I noticed neither tattooed foliage, such as our sailors affect, nor anything that resembled a beloved's name. The older style and that still popular among the savage tribes was to cover the skin so thickly with figures that they seemed a solid mass of colour, but the tendency now is towards clarity of outline with sufficient plain background to set it off. Thus I noticed near Hsipaw a youth with one arm richly tattooed and the other quite bare except for a tattooed wrist-watch whose hands were set at five minutes past twelve—a moment which had doubtless

been of importance to him, though he shied from me and would not have it commemorated on film.

When animals are drawn they are usually encircled by certain letters—called *s'ma*—of the Burmese alphabet, and if the likeness is not unmistakable the name of the animal is added beneath. The mystic squares, or *in*, are placed across the shoulder blades, the Buddhas very often across the heart. Only two inks are used even now, the blue, made of lamp-black which lasts forever, and the red which fades, though its efficacy does not, for it is compounded of magical herbs and the pulverized skin of the *tauké* lizard, which is renowned even in India and Malaya for the good luck it heralds when it cries above a house.

Most of the charms tattooed are protective and are placed on that part of the body most vulnerable to specific dangers, even on top of the head, the hair being shaved for that purpose. The only imperative one, to my knowledge, is the *a-nu se*, which insures that the love of the bearer will be returned. This consists simply of a dotted triangle, and is most often placed between the eyes, though its use on the lips for the cajoling of kisses and the tip of the tongue to form honeyed words is not uncommon. It is the only tattooing, I believe, which the women are permitted, and then only if their plight is desperate indeed. It must always be scarred out when their love is requited.

The *a-hpi se*, a protective charm, is known to schoolboys, who have it tattooed where they are generally caned, as they believe it lightens the weight of the rod. Though it still may smart, there is no convincing them that it would not hurt twice as much without the anæsthetic *a-hpi se* between themselves and justice. And when they grow to manhood a sprinkling of these same charms are supposedly efficacious against blows, bullets, and slashes of the *dah*, that herculean razor which all Shans carry, and which, in the hands of dacoits, accounts for nine-tenths of the murders in Burma. For this reason the

a-bpi se is most frequently tattooed upon the belly, throat, and top of the head. The rate of *dab* murders, incidentally, seemed to remain constant at about one a day while we were in the country, but that was explained as the result of careless tattooing or the parsimony of those who would not travel to the master *saya* we had been told to seek in the jungly north.

We were sitting one morning on the steps of a Government resthouse near Meiktila, talking of tattooing with a retired Forest Commissioner, a hale old man who had spent most of his life in the sinister Triangle of upper Burma, a district closed even to accredited explorers because the tribes living in it are still unsubdued. At 10.00 a.m. the air was steamy, even though we were in the so-called "Dry Belt," and the mosquitoes were voracious.

Jack was the only one of us who wore shorts. As he had never left the United States prior to this trip, the honest lad had bowed to the advice of some tailor whose hobby was travel books. He slapped at a family of mosquitoes on his knee.

"If these magicians could invent a tattooing to keep the bugs off," said he, "they'd have something."

The old commissioner smiled and gazed thoughtfully down the road where his fifteen-year-old housekeeper was swinging gaily towards us with a basket of fruit on her head. Four hundred rupees he had paid for her to enter his service. They seemed perfectly happy.

"Her father," he said, "had something of the sort, like many Karens: stockings were tattooed around his calves, to ward off spider bites. You'll often see stylized representations of snakes called *mwe se*, coiled round the ankles of the jungle men as protection from the bite of the cobra and the Russell's viper. I envy their faith. Why by Jove, up among the wild Was, the headhunters, who are expert at making poisoned arrows, I've seen the tips of the fingers tattooed against occupational mishaps. You can have your mosquito charm; what

I'd like is one to prevent hangover. It's a bit early, but won't you all come over for a beer, before setting out?"

We crossed the parallel ranges of central Burma, where the Taung Thu women wear ear-rings the size of carrots, and for a while we camped among the neighbouring Padaungs, the giraffe-necked people, whose throats are stretched and encased in spirals of brass. A few of these strange women had been imported as freaks to America, but had now returned to their native village of Pekkan in the hills. We left the cars at a small mission station and climbed for two days over the boulders which littered the way leading up to Pekkan. There were abysmal caves among them, each guarded by a *nat*, whose bamboo altar stood just inside. But the *nats* tolerated us; we slept at their doors beyond reach of the rain, and revered them with the incense of Leila's cooking.

We wondered, as we climbed, what effect the voyage to America could have had upon those Padaungs who made it. And when we neared the top we saw for ourselves: a woman dressed in typical Burmese wrap-around skirt and the sort of cotton blouse popular in Rangoon, plodding over the rocks with a burden as great as her own weight suspended from a strap across her forehead. Her neck, elongated grotesquely, was entirely bare. She had learned in America to be ashamed of the shame with which her own people regarded the naked neck, and so had unwound the enormous brass coils which had earned her livelihood with us.

"If we could only get that scene?" said Armand. "Get them taking off those coils and settle at last the question as to whether their necks collapse, because they've worn these things since birth. There's evidence right there that the neck can somehow be strengthened again."

The Padaung village was of reed houses raised high on stilts, with tiny doors just beneath the ridge-poles and bamboo ladders leading up to them. It was not a friendly place. We

were simply ignored as inconsequential while the villagers went blithely about their weaving and pounding of grain. The nude-necked women who had been in America performed a sort of curtsy when we passed, but they made it obvious that they distrusted us. I offered them candy made by the lowland people from the syrup of the Palmyra palm, and though they accepted it gladly enough they refused adamantly to let me look into the immense reed baskets, ten feet high, which stood by every hut and they were uninterested in selling us the coarse cotton cloth of their weaving. It was only when Armand presented each with an odorous jar of hair pomade that they glistened at ease in our tents, and brought their brass-bound sisters for us to film.

We chose one with coils from ankle to knee, from wrist to elbow and from collarbone to her squashed ears eight inches away, a surly maiden with long, drooping eyelids ("She's ptotic," said Armand, "and phthisic, too . . ."), and when the cameras were ready Jack went stalwartly to work on that incredible neck ornament. The girl grunted stoically; she would be well paid with pomade. Jack pulled like a boatman. He used all the leverage of his mechanic's science. He all but put his foot in the girl's eye to separate the first rings of that elastic coil.

We finally had to enlist two other brass-bound belles to do the job; and inch by inch, as they tugged in opposite directions, the spiral unwound. Now there was a foot of it swinging loose, now a yard and two yards, exposing a neck that was mottled white and blue from its long confinement. It didn't quite collapse. It wobbled a little like a top running down until the girl supported it with her hands. No, it didn't hurt; it just felt cold, she said, and wrapped a cloth around it, concealing it decently. The fifteen pounds of brass wire would be straightened and replaced that same afternoon.

We left the village with good film in the can, six hundred feet of it, and picking up the three cars again we drove through

a strange landscape towards Kalaw. Sudden hills of great boulders, pocked with caves, rose from the fields about us. They seemed to have been artificially created by gigantic men. As far as we could see the plains were spotted with these towers and rough pyramids, and mysteriously between them lay fenced areas which were literally rock gardens, for though the fields outside the fence might be comparatively free of rocks, inside there was almost nothing else. The rocks looked as if they had been cultivated by whatever mad gods had arranged this fantastic land.

The tribal people known as Black Karens swung round a corner occasionally and scuttled like hares when they saw our cars in their buffalo tracks. The costumes of the women were identical, black beaded leggings, black trousers and tunics, and huge square hats of scarlet homespun. There was no sign of their habitations, no structure at all except the rock garden fences and here and there a trough of bamboo about fifty feet long that pointed diagonally into the sky. These were for the sky-rockets used in their curious worship. We learned that they breathed prayers upon the tails of the rockets and sent them blazing and roaring past the ears of their gods, an ingenious system indeed. The writer, Shway Yoe, tells of another use for these rockets: when a distinguished *pongyi* dies, his funeral pyre is ignited by rockets shot at it from a distance of about fifty yards by the lay brothers who thus compete for divine promotion; the one who sets the pyre afire gains considerable merit.

Armand, because of his training in chemistry, was particularly interested to discover that the Burmese not only made their own gunpowder but that it had probably been used by them before its reputed invention by the Chinese in the ninth century, for artifacts of the Prome Kingdom (A.D. 742) are obviously retorts for the making of it.

Whenever we stopped we noticed carefully the tattooing of the natives, looking for the dancing *nats* which would

indicate that we were approaching the territory of the great Saya Maung. It was one late afternoon when we were despairing of finding either the *nats* or Hurston's snake cult that we first found the tattooing we sought on a gay old fellow who was leading his buffalo home from work, and talking to it. Three *nats*—looking like rabid marmosets—danced vigorously across his chest to avert the attention of all the evil *nats* which might afflict him. There would be no place for evil, he said, in the body of a man which was so patently devoted to joy. "Whiz!" he made a gesture as of a hornet attacking him, and "Blump!" he showed how the bad spirit crumpled against the prophylactic images.

He tugged at the rope which led to his buffalo's nostril, and leaned at ease upon the enormous horn. I looked more closely at that horn; it was actually two horns, one cemented on top of the other to add height to the man's prize beast. Throughout the Shan States the buffaloes were thus falsified with the horns of their ancestors.

Our caravan of cars, bristling with 'cameras, in no way daunted our *nat*-proofed old man.

"You will find the great Saya Maung on an island," he said, "which is in Lake Inle, which is near Taunggyi, which is at the foot of the next hills. Tell him that I, Chein Maw, have been afflicted by no evil since he cut the charms upon me long ago. Oof!" he said, and turned round the buffalo by leaning on its nose.

At last we had something to go upon, for Taunggyi and Lake Inle were mapped. We had already planned to visit the lake to film the aquatic tribe who lived there, and, we had heard, paddled great canoes with their feet. But we went leisurely now, camping off the road at villages where the chiefs would help our research into the mysteries of tattooing.

It was hereabouts that I noticed men with little knobs and thick scars like mole tunnels across their chests, and as these were raised much higher than by the African method of

cicatrization I curiously sought their meaning. They were the *hkaung-beit-set*, a form of charm which was popular in India and had doubtless been imported from there.

The *hkaung-beit-set*, properly, was not the scar pattern itself, but a talisman of gold, silver, tortoise-shell, or a precious stone which had been placed in the slit flesh. Invariably it was carved with magic symbols, so that when the skin closed above it its properties were taken directly into the blood. It was not uncommon in ancient times for a soldier to slice out the *hkaung-beit-set* of his captive, thus at once obtaining loot of value and so dispiriting the de-charmed victim that he would indifferently divulge his army's plans.

Flat discs of gold, like buttons, are often inserted beneath the skin; these are marked in four quarters, with a character of the Burmese alphabet cut into each. One character symbolizes a fish, one a peacock, one a monkey, and one a crab, for these were the avatars of Buddha before he assumed the form of a man. They were wiser animals than all their fellows, the story states, and their emblems therefore impart a sum of wisdom to the hero whom they invisibly adorn.

We passed through Thazi, and up the mountains where, pine and bamboo mingled until we reached Kalaw. There was air again here, not the sultry stuff of the valleys that we had been half breathing. And there were the Palaungs, a curious people living midway between the Shans of the lowlands and the Kachins of the hills, whose women wore broad loose belts of solid silver over their hips, and many cane girdles. Unless one has lived long in the country it is impossible to distinguish the men of one tribe from those of almost any other, though ethnologically they may be quite unlike; it is the women who are distinctive by their costumes. But among the Palaungs we found the tattooing of the men to have a fantasy we had not met with before. The strange beasts drawn upon them were recognizable, to them, as supernatural tigers, and were charms against charms, a speciality of Palaung tattooing.

As in the village of Kalé Thaungthut near the Assam frontier where every man is a wizard, so this hamlet of Palaungs near Kalaw was composed of men adept at producing counter-irritant charms called *a-kwea-ka* for the bewilderment of witches. Their tattooed tigers could make you fall out of love, if you had been charmed into it. They could combat the terrible curse of "Man-made-little," which shrinks the soul in you until it rattles like a doll in the shell of your body. And these Palaungs boasted that once they had cured a *Baw-di-tha-da*.

The *Baw-di-tha-das*, I should imagine, are usually lunatics of amazing strength or dacoits who have adopted the name knowing that the terror of it will protect them. At any rate they are few, and there are equally few *sayas* who know the necessary runes for tattooing the desperate men who will come to them at midnight and submit to the surgery while gnawing on the raw flesh of a murdered friend. Terrible images are pricked with certain drugs just over the heart where the Buddhas should be, and within a month or two the patient is known to be a *Baw-di-tha-da* by his feats of cruelty and strength. He becomes a ghoul; he murders priests and dresses in their saffron gowns; he makes buffalo vanish; and he alone can scale the polished gold pagoda spires to steal the jewelled bells on top.

No, said our Palaung chief, scratching the tail of a dragon in the small of his back, Lake Inle was not far now. Yes, the Saya Maung still lived.

We went down the mountains past a pond that had been designed by an early king to form the outline of a great crow flying. We camped at He-ho, a town as jolly as its name. We came to Taunggyi and then Yaungwhe and saw our lake before us like hammered silver in the monsoon rains.

During the many days we spent in this pleasant place we were entertained lavishly by the Sawbwa and his young wife. A Sawbwa (literally, Lord of Heaven) is the omnipotent ruler

of a Shan state. It is he alone who controls the life and death of his many thousand people with but the minimum advice of the British Commissioner. When we entered his Haw, his palace, we stepped backwards in time to the days of Marco Polo. A huge structure it was, with many pavilions, curving balconies, terraces overlooking the lake or the blue mountains behind. At one side was the private shrine of the Sawbwa's family where they worshipped their great gilt Buddha. On the other was a tiny house on stilts, a *nat*-house such as we had seen among the primitive hill tribes.

Our Sawbwa laughed. "I don't believe in *nats*, of course, but I don't disbelieve in them either, and so I put offerings there every day, just in case."

He introduced us to his wife. Lady Golden Nest her name meant in translation. His was Lord Silver. Little Tiger, their son, was playing on the floor with Emerald Moon, his half-sister.

Time in the Haw was not marked by the common minutes and hours of a clock. At three-hour intervals a group of musicians somewhere in the depths of the palace played soft Burmese songs, night and day, to indicate what time it was.

It was Lady Golden Nest who competently and charmingly arranged for us to visit the Saya Maung, as her husband was busy during our stay adjudicating a complicated case of rape with robbery. We lost our hearts to this fair princess of the peach-bloom skin and the almond eyes. Her English was nearly as good as our own, a little quaint and old-fashioned, perhaps, but perfectly adapted to the fairy stories with which, at our insistence, she delighted us during the long trips to and from the lake.

We sat comfortably among red velvet cushions in her private gondola, while the boatmen, the first leg-rowers we saw, propelled us silently down the canal that ran from the Haw to the monastery on the edge of the lake. These men were Inthas, we learned, a curious race reputedly enslaved

long ago from the Arakan Islands in the Bay of Bengal. They were forced to fish for the lazy Shans who theretofore had drugged the inlets of the lake and in consequence got national indigestion from eating so much drugged fish. Balancing on one foot on the slippery edge of the canoe, the Intha grasps his paddle with one hand at shoulder height and with the opposite foot drives the blade backwards through the water—an incredible, ludicrous performance, we thought at first, but the paddlers make excellent time and are accustomed to trading voyages of a hundred and more miles in length up and down the rivers leading from the lake.

The canoes we passed in the canal were little ones, usually paddled by one man at the stern while his wife, if the wind was right, helped at the bow with a paper parasol in lieu of a sail. Little girls paddled kneeling in their toy boats when they passed us, but when they were some distance away they leg-rowed almost as smartly as their fathers.

"It is quite true," said our Lady Golden Nest, "that Saya Maung is a great tattooer. He's eccentric, but I think he will receive you. The boatmen will explain that you are friends of mine."

We talked of the Shan States and the obvious happiness of the people under the rule of their Sawbwaws.

"In Yaungwhe," she replied, "there is not a single healthy man who is unemployed among the fifteen thousand over whom my husband rules. Long ago he passed a law requiring every idle man either to put up a two hundred rupee bond for the period he was out of work, or to go to jail. The idlers went back to their fields or their neighbours' fields immediately. I think it is true that they have been the happiest people in Burma ever since. Crime is almost unheard of in our state. Even the case which my husband is trying to-day, rape and robbery, is not half so serious as it sounds. It was only half-rape and half-robbery, I hear. In the first place, the girl was in love with the man; in the second, what he robbed

her of was the *dab* with which she had threatened to commit suicide. Her father brought the case to court to force the man to marry her, that's all."

We slipped slowly along the red-bordered canal. A misty rain fell through sunlight.

"It is the Sawbwas who are often unhappy," said Lady Golden Nest, "so great is their responsibility to their people. Do you happen to know the story of the Sawbwa of Loilem and 'the everywhere horse?' Shall I tell it to you? It will pass the time till we reach the lake."

"I'd love it," I said. "I live in a house divided, in New York, by thousands of fairy tales on one side of my living-room, and thousands of grisly mystery stories on the other. Let's hear of 'the everywhere horse.'"

While we slipped through the sunlit rain towards Lake Inle and the wizard tattooers who live on it, our Princess told us dreamily of this old legend.



The Everywhere Horse 6

NUMEROUS AGES AGO there lived in Loilem a very tired and mighty Sawbwa, but it's his minister who is best remembered now. These two were as brothers and were alike adored by the common people, for they understood that though the Sawbwa was mighty (he had once subdued the Arakanese) it was by the minister's counsel that they now lived pleasantly, unburdened by harsh laws or the peculiar taxes which formerly levied from them their loveliest girls.

With each success in war or in legislation that the minister achieved the Sawbwa gave to him more land, for he loved him as a brother, and he loved his horse. This h



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as a remark-



able creature. It was a giant of a horse, and it was whiter than November clouds, a horse such as the gods must ride.

But a time came, after a long period of peace, when a war arose with the Sawbwa of Sinli, and was won by the minister in a manner even more brilliant than ever before. The Sawbwa was hard put to it to find reward for this latest achievement. He thought of his concubines, of Sao-nan-hkam (Lady Golden Softness), and Sao-nam-ko (Lady Laughing Water), of Sao-hpong-lai (Lady Gliding Foam), whose mouth was like a tamarind blossom; of young Hsa-pu-te-hsa whose very fragrance was more witching than opium. But all these were inadequate, for the minister's concubines were as lovely as his own. He thought of gold and jewels, he thought of all his most valued possessions, he thought of land and forgot that thought, because very few acres of land were now necessary to make the minister equal in property with himself.

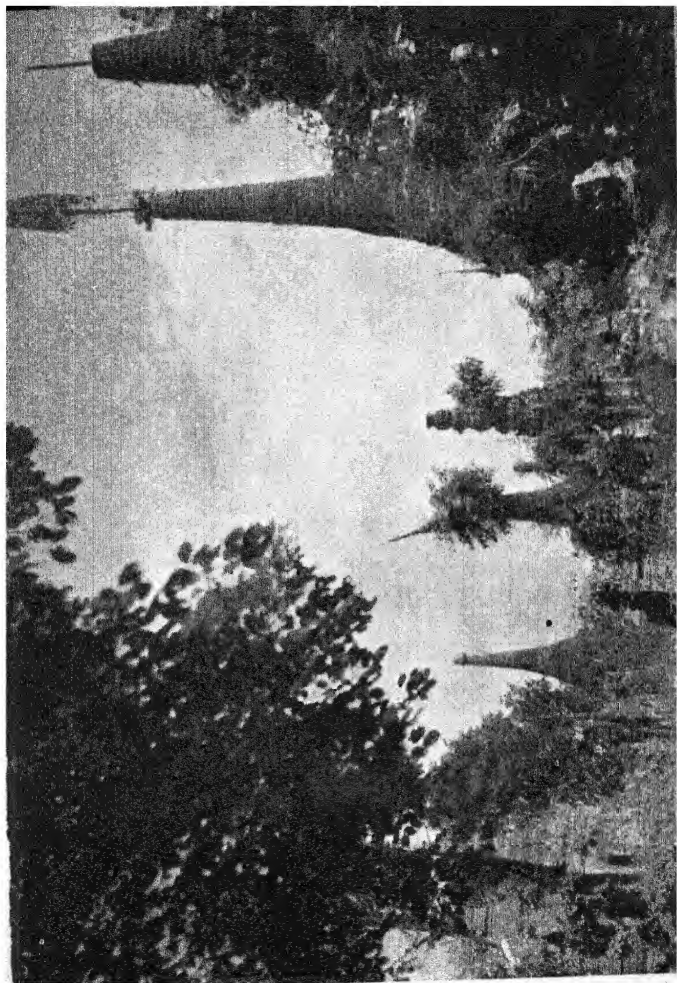
He called his minister to him.

"What do you wish?" he asked wearily. "What would you have now in token of my appreciation?"

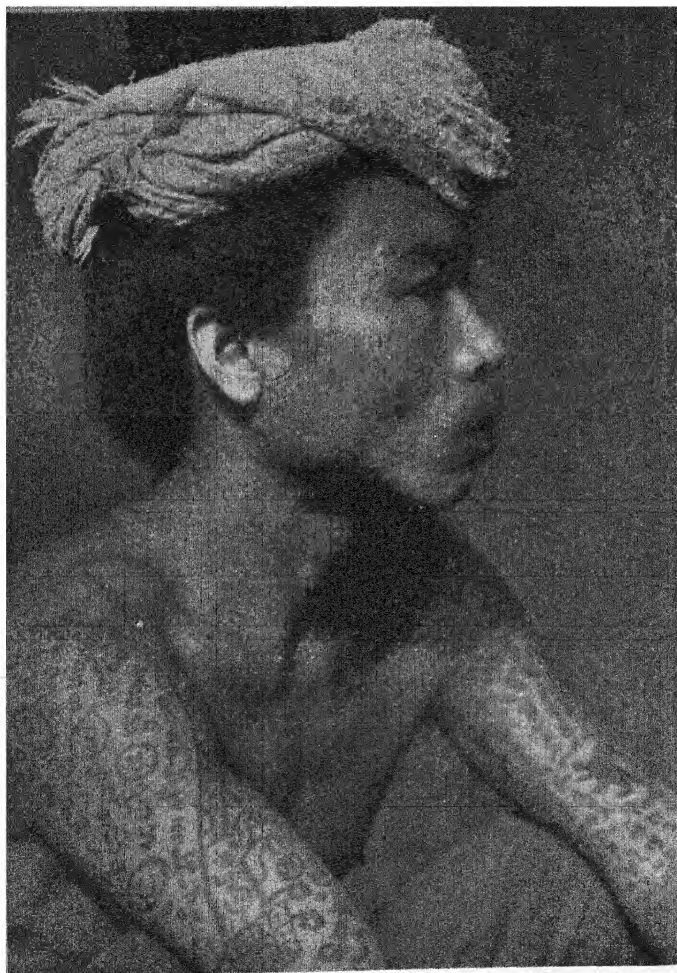
"Land," the minister smiled, but the Sawbwa shook his head. "Then," said the Minister, trembling a little, "give me your white horse. That I also love above nearly all things else; your white horse, if you feel me worthy of him."

And the Sawbwa ruefully made the gift. He loved this man as a brother.

Then the great white horse was brought out by the royal ostlers, and the minister mounted him proudly. He rode to the north and the west and the east and the south of Loilem, considering all the while the good fortune that was his, and also considering how pleasant it would be to add this patch of fertile land and that other to his already large holdings. He sighed and stroked the horse's mane, murmuring to it as affectionately as he would have, perhaps, to the Sawbwa's Hsa-pu-te-hsa, that minx of the fragrant witchery, if she had been his own.



THE RUINED CITY OF PAGAN



MAGICAL TATTOOING

And during nine days he rode in all directions about the Land of Loilem, reflecting upon these matters. The people clustered together at his passing and murmured, just loud enough for him to hear, "How splendid our minister looks upon his white horse; nearly," they murmured, "as well as the Sawbwa himself." The minister of course was pleased; and he stroked his horse's mane.

But on the tenth day the tragedy occurred. The minister had been riding from early dawn, through all the larger towns of Loilem and to the boundary on every side, and it was now evening and both he and his horse were tired. It was probably for this reason that he thought best to reject the longer and safer way home.

He came to the gully named "Surprisingly-swift-laughter." He did not hesitate, but galloped at full speed towards it and attempted to jump across. The horse soared beautifully, beautifully for a moment, touched the other side with only his fore feet and then fell backwards, while the minister, thrown to safety, stopped his ears with his hands as the thud from very far below came up to him.

For a long time he lay there, moaning and not daring to look at the horror which had happened to him, whose life until now had been all success and pleasantness. He was defeated now; all that was possible for any man to do with triumph he had done; in war, in the legislation of his Sawbwa's whims, in love even. He felt his heart panting like some great thing that dies, for now witlessly he had killed that which he almost above everything loved.

He climbed down the gully with a great deal of difficulty, for his grief had weakened him. He climbed down to the jagged floor of the gully and lay beside his white horse, moaning. He lay there all that night and all the day following and all the next day also.

And the horse swiftly decomposed and smelt very badly; it smelt abominably, for this was no usual horse. People

in the neighbouring towns first noticed it, then people in the towns some distance away. The stench was so great that they could not work in their rice fields, nor would the oxen do their furrowing. The stench—it was a smell no longer—at last reached the Sawbwa's regal nostrils, and fifteen of the bravest runners were sent out upon the fifteen roads of Loilem to ascertain the cause of it.

And in the gully of "Surprisingly-swift-laughter" they found the minister, tattered and filthy and moaning beside the corpse of what once had been a horse. They entreated him to rise and hold his sorrow in some more seemly place, to let them bury the corpse, but he answered only, "I have lost my heart's love, and I shall sit forever by the shadow of it."

And the Sawbwa's emissaries touched their brows and departed.

Daily the stench grew, and daily the Sawbwa sent to his minister new supplications, for by now even the Sawbwa could no longer endure this thing, no matter how tightly he padded the heavy blazoned doors of his Haw. Something, he thought between gulps for air and his own maundering for the white horse's death, something must immediately be done. And so he went himself to see the minister.

"Come back to the Haw," he called from the brink of the gully, "and let me have your horse buried. Come back to the Haw," he called, "and I shall give you my beautiful Sao-hpong-lai?" But the minister answered only, "I have lost my heart's love, and I shall sit here forever by the shadow of it." And the Sawbwa offered Sao-nan-hkam, then Sao-nam-ko, then little Hsa-pu-te-hsa whose very fragrance was a witchery, but the minister replied always the same.

Then the Sawbwa in desperation demanded what price the minister wished for his horse's burial. The minister stirred a little, and ceased his moaning, and appeared to reflect.

"Enough land," he said at length.

Now this was a perilous thing for the Sawbwa to give, for only a few more acres of land would swell the minister's estates to the equal of his own; a perilous thing, for the people's reverence was very nearly proportionate to the land-ownership of their lords. But the Sawbwa promised the land without demur, and the minister climbed out of the gully.

"Take these three of my councillors," said the Sawbwa moodily, marking off three men, "and go wherever you choose, and wheresoever in Loilem my councillors can smell this frightful stench, that land shall be yours."

The minister loitered no longer than to drink and gouge out a very young coconut, then set alertly off, sniffing as he went. And all four men walked north to Laikha, and south to the land of Mongnai, and to the Mongpaw hills on the west and the Nam Teng River eastwards; and everywhere they sniffed the stench of the beautiful dead horse. It seemed, furthermore, to be almost as strong on the boundaries of Loilem as it was in the gully itself. So the minister gravely returned to the Sawbwa.

"Your councillors will bear witness," he said, "that we have travelled in all directions and found no place where the scent of my horse," he wiped his eyes, "has not pervaded."

The mighty Sawbwa in his turn looked grave.

"Thus," continued the minister, "according to our pact all Loilem belongs to me. But I will not have it that way," he said with a tender smile. "An exact, an even, half of it I will give back to you, for we," he closed his eyes, "for we are as brothers."

The Sawbwa poured himself rather a large goblet of rice wine, and said mournfully, "It is not possible that everywhere this stench should pervade. Tell me, my generous minister, how you have tricked me."

The minister considered. "You are certain, you will make me a promise, that you will neither break your word nor be angry with me, who love you?"

"I swear to you an oath," the tired Sawbwa assured him.

And when the oath had been properly sworn, and the Sawbwa had taken yet another drink of wine, his faithful minister drew from his *longgyi* a small moist substance which he dropped gingerly upon the table.

"Then," said he, with the very dreamiest of smiles, "I shall have no more use for this."

And dreamily he looked down upon that bit of horse flesh.



7 The Sorcerer's Leg-Rowers

OUR PRINCESS HAD timed her story so nicely that just at its conclusion we reached the edge of the lake. Three immense canoes were waiting for us, two of them paddled by ninety men apiece and the third by seventy, all clamouring for our custom.

"I'll have to leave you here," said Lady Golden Nest. "I'd advise each of you to take a canoe. There will be less chance of an upset than if you were all together. There will be a curry waiting for you whenever you return."

Gingerly we took our places in those precarious boats, Armand and Leila in the bigger ones, I in the smaller, Roy, Quentin, Jack, and Thunderface, with the cameras in a small motor boat, so that Roy might film our journey.

We followed the shore for half a mile or so, past floating, marshy islands with small shacks and gardens upon them. They actually floated and so could be towed from one part of the lake to another. Then we headed for the open lake. The paddlers quickened their strokes and shouted defiantly back and forth. It became a race. Armand cheered lustily and Leila, in the lead, tried at the same time to wave her hat and keep aboard. Whooping and thundering with the uproar of

the drums we carried to mark the stroke, our boatmen kicked down their paddles in amazing unison. They shouted like fiends. Like centipedes or like Roxy's Rockettes the three boats scrambled on two hundred and fifty legs across the water. My men were losing, and as they doubled their efforts the bow of the boat went under and suddenly a fat spear of water came plunging along the deck, smashed into me and somersaulted me into the lake beneath the capsized canoe and my seventy paddlers.

I came up spluttering to see Roy howling with laughter as he cranked the Akeley towards me. "Wonderful! Wonderful!" he yelled. I struck out bravely, as all good movie actors do, ignoring him, remembering not to look at his callous camera, thinking of the light meter which lay soaked in one pocket and the jaunty feather from the tail of our Princess's parrot that had disappeared from what once had been my hat.

When the boat was righted we continued more circumspectly. The rains stopped and I dried. The drums beat slower, the gong syncopating with them. The paddlers, without losing a stroke, laughed and gossiped. Though we had been travelling for over an hour by now they did not change sides, as I would have expected, to rest the legs that balanced them upon the two-inch gunwale, for they were apparently right-leg-rowers and left-leg-rowers and could work only in their accustomed place. They were easily distinguishable by the uneven development of their calves.

There was not a man without a great display of tattooing across his back, mostly of the crossword puzzle variety called *in*, but here and there was one with a troupe of the dancing *nats*, which seemed actually to dance as the muscles rippled beneath them. The men who wore them, I noticed, were very much alike; they had more spirit than their fellows and all resembled that gay old chap we had met with his buffalo. The youngest of them, who had four *nats* only, kept laughing

and beating his chest with his spare hand, and seemed to be trying to tell me something.

I understood at last. If the sahib—that was I—would pay for the operation, the boy would ask Saya Maung to tattoo another *nat* upon him, so that the generous sahib could see how it was done.

Just before the evening rains caught up with us we rounded a cape and saw a strange little island, about forty feet across. It was swampy and seemed to be held together by a haphazard system of bamboo poles which were poked horizontally into it like knitting needles. In the centre was a thatched hut, high at the ridgepole and low at the eaves, waving whiskers of thatch fronds in the wind, like a hut in a fairy tale. We waded through a garden of lotuses and entered the sacrosanct abode of the Saya Maung.

There was nothing definitely remarkable about him except his age, which might have been Biblical, and the absence of tattooing on his own skin. He had indeed a manner of worldliness which was disconcerting in one who could not have met more than half a dozen white men in all his life. He looked us each in the eye as he brewed Shan tea, a pale green potion into which is stirred a fingernail-load of salt per cup, then he passed it graciously around. My paddler sat with us, uneasy now in the presence of the magical man.

As we had sent Thunderface and Quentin back with the film in the motor boat, we had to strain our five vocabularies to understand him, though he talked simply in bazaar Burmese.

He was very cordial, and in no hurry at all. We must sit down and be comfortable, he protested to Armand who was simultaneously protesting that we must soon leave before the storm became too severe, for there was no shelter in the canoes. Ah, unthinkable! There was the dye to be prepared, the style to be sharpened . . . We sat back, resigned, in the murky hut with the smoke of a petrol tin stove smarting our eyes.

It was a delicate operation, he said, an art far superior to that of mere painting or carving in wood. One must be physician as well as artist in magic, he said modestly, for there is the administration of the drug to be first considered, then the care of the wounds which are easily inflamed, causing fever, then the constant surveillance of the patient when the itching becomes almost intolerable and any scratching will not only produce a nasty sore but distort the tattooed figure and therefore weaken the power of the charm.

The rain whipped down so hard now that I thought it would split the fronds of which the hut was built, and we could hear the "ponk" of the canoes as they were swung against each other. The men were laughing.

My young paddler sat absolutely still, in a sort of trance. The *saya* moved close to him and showed him an ancient book of hand-made Shan paper, a sample book, obviously, for its rough pages were illustrated with drawings of every conceivable sort of *nat*: dancing *nats*, amorous *nats*, *nats* with spears jutting from their eyes. The youth pointed to one of these latter and indicated a space for it in the ballet on his chest.

Deftly the *saya* drew the outline with a Chinese brush. "You are ready, son?" He was ready. The *saya* put beside him a lacquerware pot of the glistening black tar-like substance that was opium, and passed him the pipe, the flame, and the needle. The boy was soon drugged and reclining easily across the extended leg of the *saya*, his head propped against the wall. A small gecko lizard, upside-down above him, stared with its jewelled eyes into his dim ones.

Roy and Armand moved closer, whispering about the light, the composition of the scene, for they might film it to-morrow, but the old man waved them away. Carefully he mixed sesamum oil lampblack with a little water and sharpened the nibs of his wooden style. This was made of the male or solid bamboo and split into pointed quarters so that the ink would be retained between them. The *saya* fitted this four-

inch style into a female bamboo about a foot and a half long, cut off three inches below its bottom joint to allow the style to slide only that distance into it. Its top end was weighted with a brass figure of a duck such as the natives use to balance their scales.

For a long while the *saya* sat nearly motionless, touching gently the *nats* already tattooed on the brown chest across his thigh. He put his fingers together occasionally as though in prayer. The smoke of the brazier filled the room, dense and pungent, and with the fumes of the opium I began to feel sick. It must obviously be my imagination, but it seemed that the floor of the house was lifting and falling, pushing me a little off balance, as if I were on a boat. Leila was swallowing hard.

At last the *saya* began his operation, taking the bamboo tube between forefinger and thumb of his right hand, dipping it in the ink, placing the style points upon the figure he had drawn and cracking it down sharply with the palm of his left hand. The style, like the gold-tamping instrument which dentists use, snapped back into its tube and was checked by the joint. The boy groaned, and so did I, for I could see the deep puncture from where I sat, several feet away. The next puncture was less than a sixteenth of an inch from the first, and the boy groaned again as the style bit into him. There would be hundreds of these punctures necessary to make up that tiny design.

We sat for what seemed hours drinking salted tea to assuage our queasy stomachs, while the sweet smoke twisted around us, the boy groaned regularly and the storm lashed at our fragile roof. There was no escape for us now, in weather like this. The *saya* never looked at us. Round and round the figure he worked, with the boy groaning an immediate echo to the dull smack of the style. No one spoke. We all felt too ill, and each of us was wondering if his reason had been affected by this dream-like scene, for each of us felt that the floor was heaving beneath him.

Then through the storm came a sudden cry, a banshee's wail that sent the shivers up my spine. The *saya* went on working. Again the wail went up and following it came a jar that shook the hut and brought me staggering to my feet. The *saya* nodded absently and pointed with his bamboo to the closed door. We didn't need the suggestion. Armand and I jumped through it and stood incredulous before the hut.

There were the three canoes ahead, lashed by their sterns to our island. There on the shore ten feet away was the ramshackle monastery from which we had set out that afternoon. And there stood our genial Sawbwa of Yaungwhe.

I understood at last the heaving of the floor and the uneasy sensations we had experienced within the hut. While we had been attentive to the tattooing, deafened by the storm, the three giant canoes had quietly towed our island across the lake, just as the garden islands had always been towed to leeward of the seasonal winds.

We stepped ashore in rain and the air was clean to our clogged lungs. The paddlers turned. The island and its hut slid off into the lake again, bearing its magic to leeward of us and far away.



Mad Monks and Amorous 8 Elephants

IT WAS HARD to leave Yaungwhe, our hospitable Sawbwa and the Lady Golden Nest, but if we were to look for the Hill of the Snake and reach China before the worst of the monsoon we had to be on our way. We said good-bye over many cups of salted tea, and when the Sawbwa was occupied with the salt shaker that wouldn't shake, our Princess quickly

reached behind her and jerked a feather from the parrot's tail. "Yawp!" said the parrot. A breeze blew through the verandah and whisked the feather from the Princess's hand. Roy and I both clutched at it but the breeze lifted it away from us and carried it up and up above the shrine where the *nats* were unquestionably laughing.

"Good-bye. Good-bye."

The first tributary of the Salween River led out of Lake Inle, but it seemed unlikely to be the one we sought according to Thunderface, so we drove north-east to the second and the third, following cart tracks which each morning looked untraversable when we had decided that they really were tracks and not just spaces between the trees. Here was untouched jungle, unvisited by white men simply because there was no reason for them to come here. But gradually we were encouraged in our quest; we must be nearing our immediate goal, the valley of Kya Lap Sing, we felt one night as we sat at our tent entrances listening to the shrieking insects of the wood. For more and more frequently we had seen the cylindrical cloth streamers waving from bamboo poles above the jungle villages, the emblems of Naga, the fertility god. When we had asked of Kensi, no one had answered us at all. Kya Lap Sing they would admit to, vaguely, but at the mention of Kensi they walked away.

In the morning we could see mountains downstream but no roads leading in that direction and, more because the land was dramatic and the people wild than because we expected immediately to find either Kensi or Kya Lap Sing, we had our men build rafts and drifted down the river. Very often it was choked with vines which we had to slash through with *dabs*. Rhesus monkeys leaned down to look at us. The hot air was meshed with dragonflies. We had a breakfast of rice and mangoes on board, moving constantly in a vain attempt to outdistance the mosquitoes. They were more like storks than mosquitoes.

Gradually the river narrowed and the walls of mossy rocks rose higher on each side of us, straighter as well for their tops were drawing together and even a hundred feet above our heads the creepers were now linking wall and wall. It was a cavernous place, unlighted by the sun which still was below its zenith.

Thunderface took his cheroot from his mouth and remarked through the mosquitoes, "Looks like Kya Lap Sing, from what I hear. The old guy at Pagan said the monks never come to this temple until just about noon, which is the only time the sun shines in. The snakes go away then, he said."

Go away? There was something wrong then. We were looking for Naga worship with the snakes always present as the legend described. I wondered if the priest at Pagan had side-tracked us purposely.

I called to Leila and Armand on the first raft, but we rounded a bend at that moment and saw before us the temple.

It stood tall upon the shore to our left, built of some dark basalt, I guessed, spiring into the deeper shadow where the cliff jutted over it. It was a simple but awesome Buddhist edifice, not Hindu in any way, as it should have been if the Naga were worshipped there. The cliff backed it, and on the other three sides were rows of countless small pagodas erected to indicate to Buddha the devotion of their builders. Plaques of green glazed sandstone—the art of this has long been lost—ornamented its base and the lintel of the door which led to the sanctuary.

"It's close to noon," said Thunderface. "Maybe those monks won't like us being here. They'll be coming soon."

Roy swung his camera cases ashore. "That's fine. We'll film them. I like monks." Armand had gone ahead, already framing the scene with his fingers.

We met the first snake with our first step upon the flagstone court of the temple, a Russell's viper, thick and short and more vicious in appearance than even the cobra. We met

two others within the holy crypt, and as we approached the sitting Buddha, a fine alabaster piece of the Talaing period, a viper slithered from its lap and crawled behind it.

"No cobras," said Armand disgustedly. "This isn't anything like the place, but let's get a shot of the approach to it anyway."

We had turned to leave when a disc of golden light a yard in diameter slipped towards us across the floor, came to rest on my shoes, slipped out of the door again. My heart missed a beat. Roy's eyes were popping as we rushed to the door. For a hundred feet up and down the dark river the water was dappled with these ghostly lights. They travelled along the shore and crawled like vermin over us. They slid down the cliff behind us, across the temple, and gradually converged until we were standing in a pool of light.

We shielded our eyes, and when we looked to the top of the opposite cliff we were nearly blinded by what seemed at first a hundred suns blazing directly down at us.

"Mirrors!" Armand exclaimed.

"Monks!" said Thunderface.

We fell back under the branches of a great tree, where the light could not reach us, and saw then that the cliff was covered with monks whose orange robes flared like flames in the sun, and each was holding what must have been a mirror in his hand, an ingenious means to examine their snake-infested temple when the sun did not reach it. They could see the Buddha thus, and perform their devotions, as we later learned, without descending to the river's pit. They could watch for the Hindu fanatics who were continually troubling them. Or for moving picture men. The mirrors were apparently those which we had noticed most Burmese carrying for use while plucking the few hairs which grew on their chins.

But we didn't think of this then, for the monks were shouting wildly at us. I remembered with shame that we had neglected to remove our shoes when we entered the

temple, as if trespassing on holy ground were not affront enough. I remembered the Yenang-yaung oil-field riots. Englishmen had been assaulted for less than this, and it seemed wise for us to clear out fast.

As we turned in that multiple spotlight and rushed to the rafts, we saw several of the monks hurrying down a steep path towards us.

"For God's sake, Thunderface!" Armand shouted.

Thunderface stood placidly watching the little old monk who was far in the lead. "I'll wait. I want to talk to him."

"Come back here and don't be a fool!" I yelled. The monk seemed intent on murder. Thunderface waved us away and we poled to the middle of the stream, watching our Indian anxiously. The monk raced like a gnat straight for that proud bronze figure, but Thunderface caught him by the robe and nearly unfrocked him as he dragged him howling to a thorny thicket beside the river. There was silence for a moment. The monks on the cliff stood motionless, menacing. Then the cries broke forth again. Then silence.

"Now we've got a murder on our hands," said Leila.

At a call from the bank we turned to see Thunderface striding casually towards us. He spat into the water, rinsed his hands and climbed aboard.

"He's O.K.," he said. "He told me where Kensi is, sort of. I gave him ten rupees for his church."

He would explain no more than that, but it was a very muddy monk we saw slinking into the temple as we poled upstream from the Valley of Night.

We smiled at the dear old Dodges when we came back to them. The seats were soft in comparison with the bamboo rafts. The radios brought us civilized news calmly delivered from a world of comfort we had nearly forgotten. Gently we brushed the curious natives from our running boards and started on. For the next three days we drove through rain, sucked rain through our food and clothes and spirits. We

came to the great Salween River which rises in the Tibetan plateau and rushes south for nearly two thousand miles to the Gulf of Martaban. As the current is so fierce at Takaw, where we crossed, the raft ferry is attached by rope and pulley to a cable sixty feet above the water. By setting the rudder of the raft so that the bow is turned away from the cable towards the farther shore the boat is propelled across by the current, without effort by the boatmen.

It seemed that wherever we went now we were encountering Buddhist monks, the *pongyis*, like ghosts to remind us of Kya Lap Sing. Early each morning we would see them on their begging tour of the villages. First would come two young novices beating a gong slung from a bamboo pole between them, and behind them, in their yellow robes, the begging-bowls in their hands, serene and apparently humble, would follow the monks. The brown housewives would rush from their huts to meet them and offer rice or curry or fruit, no matter how small the amount, for it is a fine thing to give alms to these meditative men. It is never acknowledged. The cover of the bowl is lifted, the food deposited and without a glance of gratitude the monk moves on. The next follows him, and the next and the next, each receiving only a spoonful from each house, perhaps, until the day's meals for all the monastery are assured. Always they must beg their food, for this is part of the self-discipline which they believe conducive to humility.

Jack worked himself into a fine rage over them. "Why don't these *pongyis* go to work," he growled, "instead of panhandling off the poor people?"

It is a strange employment, this of the monasteries. A man may enter whenever he feels the need for his soul. He may leave when he chooses, and when he has had enough of worldliness he may become a monk again. Supposedly the monks must refrain from sin in any form, the worst of all being the murder of life, but although they will carefully

pick the vermin from their clothes and lay the innocent creatures aside with gentleness, the official *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States* has shown that nearly every serious uprising against the British Government has been concocted in some monastery, and that the leaders of dacoit or robber bands are not infrequently these same Buddhist monks. We were amazed at the number of counterfeit silver rupees which came into our hands ; they were, the court records showed, for the most part minted in the monasteries. The Yenang-yaung oil riots, as I have already mentioned, were instigated by the monks, but there is, on the other hand, unquestionable good done by them. In many parts of Burma they are the only teachers the people have ; their knowledge is scant, but they alone are responsible for the amazing literacy of the land.

We drove east through the Shan States, seeking the district where we should find Kensi and the Hill of the Snake according to the information which Thunderface extracted from the muddy monk. A dozen times as we sat eating supper under a tarpaulin that thundered with the pounding of the rain, we decided that if the road were as bad to-morrow as it was to-day, we would turn back. We had already lost too much time on this vague quest. But although the road grew worse we still kept on. Small, rugged mountains barred our path, but somehow we got over them, averaging twenty miles a day at best, ploughing through and skidding out of ruts, laying teak planks over the deeper runnels and placing them like a wall at corners where the cars might slip from a precipice. We drove through Kiulong, Kengtung, Loimwé, and turned south, at Thunderface's behest, towards Siam.

We had spent a week wandering in the jungle and were definitely ready to give the whole thing up when the storm gods of those parts took the matter out of our hands. We were confused one evening by the continual forking of the flooded bullock-cart track, but we kept on blindly in the hope of finding shelter. The jungle was so dense here and the

deluge so severe that it seemed impossible to erect the tents. We knew we were low on petrol, but it was only when Jack's truck, the last car in line, ran completely out of it that Armand decided we had better stop and sleep in the cars.

We slept in them for five nights, until I began to feel I would be permanently crooked. Every day we made tentative journeys forward in Armand's car, but we found nothing ahead but a diminishing track. Even if we shared our petrol with the truck it would have been impossible to go back the way we came. We could not back out for miles along that narrow alley; we could not turn the truck because it was walled by a huge rock on one side and three large trees on the other. Nor could we get past it with the cars.

"There's only one thing possible that we can do," said Armand glumly. "Simply wait for decent weather and walk in one direction or the other for help. It would be foolhardy trying to hike it now."

Fortunately we had plenty of food with us. Our time was not entirely lost as we employed it in recording on film the jungle sounds around us: the cries of weird birds—there were many peacocks—usually invisible above the matted canopy of leaves; the cough of leopards; the shrill, metallic clamour of the cicadas that nearly deafened us; the chatter of monkeys; and occasionally the scream of a distant elephant.

On the fifth night, a dry one at last, we had pitched our tents in the path and turned in early with the intention of trying to escape on foot next morning from that malarial jungle that imprisoned us. Jack already had a touch of fever, and in his usual hearty way was eating so much quinine that we could almost hear the ringing in his ears.

At about two in the morning we were all wakened suddenly by the trumpeting of elephants near by, a chilling sound to those who hear it for the first time, high-pitched, agonized, like the whinnying of a herd of horses. We stumbled from the tents, straining our eyes into the darkness. When the

trumpeting sounded again it was quite close to us, but we could hear no movement of the animals among the trees.

"Better get into the cars," said Armand. "Put up the windows and keep low."

We were no sooner in than we saw two massive bull elephants bearing down from one side of us and a female from the other. They looked like the Himalayas to me.

Thunderface, always eager to be helpful, turned on a flashlight. Armand slapped it from his hand, but in that instant of light he had seen hope for us.

"Did you see it?" he whispered excitedly. "That female's shrunk ankle where a chain has been around it. That's a work elephant! She has probably broken loose from some teak estate near by to meet these two wild bulls. If we can follow her, we'll find a way out of here."

"Sure," said Thunderface weakly. "Sure."

Some of us had lived with elephants in Africa during the filming of "Dark Rapture," but we had never been this close to them during the rutting season. We were too close altogether. By the thin moonlight filtering through the leaves we saw the nearer bull suddenly lunge at the rear of the lorry which blocked his way. We took a grip on things. If they got our scent they would crush the cars like Christmas tree bangles, despite those fine Budd bodies. Never, I thought, had my breath tasted so bad.

But the female had passed the cars now and had stopped some distance off. The males turned their attention upon each other, rushing together with lifted trunks, colliding resoundingly. Up flashed a tusk in the moonlight, but it missed its mark; the other elephant got a trunk-hold on it and nearly wrenched the head from his attacker. It was terrifying to watch that titanic battle. We sat paralysed until one beast was worsted, though he was apparently unhurt, and went lumbering off. The triumphant male and the female started slowly in the opposite direction.

"Fine. Come on," said Armand.

"What?"

"We're following them. They won't bother us. They're in love."

We hurriedly put on our boots and damp clothes. We crawled through the forest to a little clearing, and there witnessed a colossal love-making that few white men have ever seen. The animals jostled each other and buffeted each other's heads like gigantic lamps. They seemed to blow screaming kisses through their trunks and nuzzle each other clumsily. Love on such a physical scale is indescribable.

The male finally plodded away, with a swagger, I thought, and the female haughtily turned tail and started back by the way she had come.

"Here's our chance," said Armand. "Are we all going?"

We were. We were all too excited to sit in that steamy camp until morning. The elephant was not hard to follow, for the path she had trampled was a broad one, but we pursued that siren for at least ten miles before daylight showed us the welcome sight of a logging camp and a cheerful young Scotsman who introduced himself as Eric Gongue.

"So you've brought April!" he remarked, and we fumbled for speech until he explained that April was his favourite elephant's name. When he had soundly berated her and anchored her amidst exclusively female companions he led us to his bungalow to meet the charming Mrs. Gongue. Their year-old baby was teething on a circlet of elephant tusk.

Within ten minutes we were offered bullocks, petrol, refrigerated beer and the courage to keep on to Kensi.

"Kensi?" asked Gongue, as we reposed our dirty bodies on his clean bamboo veranda. "I believe that's the old name of a village about a day's march from here. It's called Kawmyo now. I suppose that's the place you're after, though I haven't been there and can't say whether they worship snakes or not. Shouldn't wonder though. They're crazy enough.

Live on opium and *bhang* and stuff, I hear. If there is snake worship there it probably came up the Mekong River from Cambodia, where the Khmers used to practise it, you know, rather than directly from India across Burma. I'd come along with you but I've a stand of teak to cut before the rains get bad."

"Can we get through by car?"

"Impossible. It's a wonder you've managed to come this far. Take my elephants, and the mahouts will guide you. A few of them go there occasionally to buy their *bhang*."

So hospitable were these good folk, these "jungle wallahs," that they turned over their whole camp to us when they learned we were interested in making a brief elephant sequence for the film. We ate and slept and worked with the elephants for the next week, marvelling anew at their intelligence and extraordinary strength. The Shan mahouts began training them at the age of four, before they were yet independent of their mothers and the solicitous old "aunties" who attach themselves to the family as soon as a baby is born. When mature the elephants do their work with only the most casual hints from their mahouts (who, incidentally, have no love for them at all), clearing the jungle, piling teak, rolling the logs into the river. Large as they are, their power is astonishing. We filmed one old fellow dragging a log which Gongue judged to weigh four tons. Strong too are their passions: this was not the first time that the romantic April had broken away; she had once marched twenty-six miles for love's sake, with her chain wound carefully around her foot so that it would not tangle among the trees. Another elephant, a bull, got into a brawl over April while we were in camp and received a terrific tusk wound in the shoulder. This the mahouts strangely tended by stuffing into it the chopped meat of twenty chickens plus a great amount of garlic and some iodoform.

Anthrax had until recently been common on all the teak

estates, but *surrah*, a form of pernicious anæmia, was the greater problem now. Gongue cured it dramatically by feeding his sick elephants huge quantities of arsenic wrapped in hay. His care of them was touching. Even the healthy animals were given a long vacation from February till June and another in October. They were bathed regularly, pampered with imported hay and coddled like children. They obviously adored this young man who was absolute master over miles of jungle, as did also the mahouts perhaps because for the first time they had a boss who fully trusted them. He had not been here long before he was told that whenever the logging operations moved to a new area of the estate the *nats* must be propitiated by the offer of one small bottle of rum, one cigarette, and one completely black rooster for every elephant on the job. Gongue took their word for it and made the offerings, without ever checking up on the *nats'* appetites. Sure enough, those offerings proved an effective prophylactic against trouble in the camp.



9 The Hill of the Snake

REGRETFULLY, WE HAD to leave at last. We rocked away on elephant-back through the forest of teak, the broad leaves of it curtaining the sun. Here lived many *nats*, as attested by the numerous crude little huts, well stocked with rice and fruit, under the larger trees. There would be miniature fences around them, their palings fortified with black cock feathers. We climbed gradually; the teak was replaced by pine; the shrilling cicadas were left behind and in the absence of their clamour our journey was heralded by a symphony of birds, the crows and the crow pheasants, the cuckoos, quail, hoopoe; and when we came to a clearing

atop a hill a male peacock shot into the sky, dangling the ponderous beauty of his tail.

North of us rose a jungly mountain to about six thousand feet, and west, where the three countries joined, squatted a number of lesser hills, their jungles folded about them like the cloaks of trolls sleeping with their heads on their knees.

Armand in the lead suddenly flung up his arms and tried to find a footing in the teetery *howdah*, the elephant saddle. "There it is! Gongue is right! That's Kensi sure! That's Hurston's black mountain! Look at it!"

A great swab of cloud was travelling above the hills to the west, and when it had passed we saw a black, nearly symmetrical pyramid of a mountain which seemed to correspond exactly with the one Hurston had described. The village at its foot was almost indistinguishable, but over it streamed the long cloth snakes, the emblem of the Naga and the token of our gaol.

We yelled at the mahouts and the mahouts prodded our colossal vehicles. We went down that hill like an avalanche, loped across the level regardless of clattering teeth and pounding posteriors, and only slowed when we heard a terrific din coming from the village. Drums and flutes and weird stringed instruments were playing all together to accompany a moaning melody which seemed to be made by human lungs.

We entered the village slowly, with the dignity befitting white men. The musicians didn't pause; they scarcely looked at us. Some had kidney-shaped violins, some had the usual narrow drums with clay daubed on the heads to raise the tone, and some were playing floppy flutes which seemed to be jointed in several places. The half-naked village men, their long hair twisted into topknots, had eyes only for the procession of musicians that was winding through the single muddy street, and the women, wearing embroidered red skirts similar to the Kengtung kilts, sat before their huts and moaned. Only a few of the younger men, who looked less entranced

than their elders, reached for pellet bows and watched us suspiciously.

"Don't stop," Armand advised us; "follow the procession slowly." But my mahout waited to point through the open door of the hut beside me.

"*Bhang!*" he said. The old man of the house had been smoking hemp, I judged from the accessories around him, and was now lolling on a filthy mat. At three more huts I saw the same thing, and when my mahout pointed at one after another of the spectators to the procession, saying "*bhang! bhang! bhang! bhang!*"—like a boy cowboy shooting Indians—I assumed that most of the village was drugged. He spoke for a moment to one of the older men, who fairly shouted his reply, a long complaint accompanied by gestures which unmistakably indicated the nature of it, then hurried on to reach Thunderface so that I might have it interpreted.

"Great fortune!" said Thunderface. "Not one son has been born in this village for over a year, and they are going to try to get their sacred serpent to fix it up."

"Great fortune indeed," said Armand. "Will they mind us watching?"

"We can try. They don't seem to have spirit enough even to be curious about white men, which most of them have never seen. This race," said Thunderface pontifically, "is decayed."

When we caught up with twelve musicians we noticed that a woman was now leading them, a woman who might well have been a creature of the infamous Dr. Fu Manchu. She was dressed in the purest white from throat to ankles. The *longgyi* skirt was wound tight around her waist and the long-sleeved blouse fitted like a dazzling skin, a strange contrast to the sombre nudity of her companions. Her face was farded white with some heavy paste, and her agate eyes were those of a snake.

"Hsa-pu," said my mahout—her name, I supposed.

Riding beside her, and staring fascinated at her, I had forgotten the sacred hill ahead, and it was not until she left her musicians and started off alone that I looked up. It was Hurston's hill and no mistake. Before us was the serpentine stairway, a foot wide, winding into the clouds, and slowly along it climbed the weird Hsa-pu, followed by a fattish youth who bore a roll of mats and a tray with offerings of coconut and fruit and rice.

We knelt our elephants and got down. Hsa-pu was far ahead by now and we followed hurriedly in single file. Each step of the stair was shaped like a scale of the Naga, crudely cut of flagstone, and where the rain had settled upon it and thin moss grown it was slimy as a serpent's skin. I turned to look at the musicians who still were playing, and the half-drugged villagers with their pellet bows held indecisively, but they made no move to stop us. We climbed for half a mile, slippery step by step, until we reached the lowering mists.

The stairs levelled here and seemed to go directly into the solid earth. We had expected to find some sort of temple at the top, but the grassy court where we stood, watching Hsa-pu, led to a low precipice which was honeycombed with small caves. Thunderface was at my side and the mahout beside him, explaining as best he could this extraordinary ritual.

There was just light enough to see, far in the depths of the largest cave, a low cot woven of vines, and flower garlands suspended from pegs above it. Hsa-pu went in slowly, followed by her servant, and in a moment he came backing out, looking neither to right nor left but abjectly laying the mats straight before him. The mahout was whispering. Hsa-pu had gone to propitiate her god, Hsa-pu whose ancestors for centuries had exclusively had the knowledge of the snake and the secret of placating him. And Hsa-pu it must be of this generation to discuss with the god all matters of fertility, whether of crops or beasts or women. This year no sons

had been born to Kensi, and so Hsa-pu had come to exert her powers.

We could dimly see her raise the tray of offerings to the height of her eyes, scoop a fistful of rice, blow upon it and flick it in all directions, to appease the other gods, I assumed. Then she put the tray upon the cot and knelt beside it.

It was nearly dark by now ; the sun beyond the mist was sinking and the orange light that reached the cave was whitened suddenly with a flare of lightning. We could hear the music far below, muffled by mist, and from the cave came strange noises, alternately sibilant and explosive, that sent a shiver up my spine. Hsa-pu was squatting, backing towards us, talking to the snake that lived within, drawing him out along the mats.

We too backed off and stood breathless before the creature we saw.

This was the King Cobra, or Hamadryad, at least fourteen feet in length, as large, I believe, as they ever grow. His hooded head arched four feet above the ground, on a level with Hsa-pu's breast as he wove after her.

"My God!" said Armand, who cherishes snakes. "Do you suppose it has its fangs?"

The mahout was whispering hoarsely to Thunderface who passed on the message to me. These snakes, he said ("serpents," he corrected himself), were caught in the jungle and brought once a year to the sacred mountain, where Hsa-pu made a pact with them, promising to return them within twelve months to their homes. She would be bitten, she knew, if she broke faith. The snakes were then content to remain within the cave, where she fed them with frogs once every five days and besought their boon when the need arose. The fangs and the venom were untampered with—you can't pull the teeth of your god—and since the King Cobra, because of his enormous secretions, carries over a hundred times the lethal dose of venom, we realized that we were witnessing perhaps the most dangerous religious ritual in the world.

Now the woman and the snake were upon the mat before the cave, Hsa-pu squatting, approaching and backing with quick smooth movements of her heels, drawing the attention of the god with her left hand and striking it lightly with her right, as a boxer might do. Now she rose to a crouch and curved one arm over it, farther and farther back until the snake rose erect as far as it could reach and she could gently bring down her hand upon its head, forcing it flat upon the ground. She would humble it thus, remind it of her power, before she wheedled it for the village sons.

The snake, the god, sprang back hissing when she released it. Squatting again less than three feet away she tempted it with her knees, swinging them together from side to side, opening and closing them, until the snake lunged and she could catch it beneath the throat with the side of her open hand. Lightning forked across the dusk like a snake tongue threatening us.

Hsa-pu backed round in a circle now, always squatting, and the huge snake pursued her. With forefinger pressed to thumb of her left hand she seemed to draw it towards her, as if by a thread, while with her right hand she made curious lithe gestures similar to those used in the Tibetan worship. Her face was set hard as a mask. Sweat beaded her forehead and ran down in grey lines across her powdered cheeks.

Roy was beside me. "This is incredible!" Leila started to speak, then suddenly pointed to the cliff. From the holes beside the cave of the god three common cobras were slowly emerging.

"Jack, look!" Jack looked, and reached for a boulder, but the mahout stopped him. A fourth cobra, six feet long, had raised its head within striking distance of his thigh. The mahout nodded reassuringly.

The music from below grew gradually faster and Hsa-pu's movements quickened with it. Rain was falling now, and the great snake glistened as he tried to get close enough to his

tormentor to strike. She bent forward, protruded one knee, and when the snake flung towards her, hurtling half its body from the ground, she received its fangs in the taut skirt which her knees had spread. A stain grew slowly there.

I could hear Armand muttering, and from the corner of my eye, I saw his finger point. "There's another." Another cobra, a small one, was within five feet of us. This was getting a bit thick, I thought; we were interested in strange cultures, but—but I was as fascinated as the snakes by this amazing woman. I scarcely felt the rain that was flailing against us now.

Hsa-pu lowered her head almost to the ground and looked sidewise at her god; and he rose and remained motionless above her, hood expanded and jaws wide to strike again, while she talked to him gently. She laid her hand upon her abdomen and then upon the earth, and along the muddy print where the snake had fallen when he struck at her, she drew her two hands caressingly then cupped her breasts with them.

The rain was blinding. We shielded our eyes and leaned forward, trying to watch the other snakes and the god at once. The lightning was continual now, and the sound of thunder drowned out all the music with the exception of the whining flute. I realized with a sudden chill in the marrow of me that neither Hsa-pu nor the snake had moved in a very long while, but had remained watching each other's eyes, she crouched and he overlooking her like a god.

Then with almost imperceptible motion her head was rising. Her head was curving across the green, lightning-lighted sky till it was level with her god's, and slowly it came forward. There were but two feet between them now. Now there was but one.

Hsa-pu, her hands behind her, leaned slowly down and pressed her mouth against the poisonous mouth of her great god, and the trembling that ran through her whole body

seemed communicated to his before he swung his head to one side and moved off into the cave.

Hsa-pu remained kneeling, her forehead in her hands. My breath came slishing out and I was aware suddenly that the storm had swung with all its fury upon us, lashing leaves in my face and pressing me towards the stair which led to supper and sanity, and a long hot drink.

We spent seventeen days at Kensi, waiting for the weather to clear sufficiently for us to film Hsa-pu and her amazing ritual. She was perfectly willing. Although the great duty of her life was towards her own village and the Naga, the serpent god, she had several times travelled to the west and south of Burma, "charming" common cobras at the five-day markets and drawing the snakes from the estates of white men, an inexplicable feat performed by no one else in Burma though it is quite matter-of-course in India proper.

Surely, she felt, it could do no harm to implore the god's favours once again in behalf of the sonless village women, particularly when for her pains she would receive some very natty apparel which Leila had outworn. But what really clinched it, I think, was Jack's offer of a gift to the god.

Jack was the only one of us who could be called a hunter. He had shot bear and moose in Maine, and here it was his heart's desire to try his skill with tiger or binturong, the bear cat, or the great rhinoceros which is now found only in this wild corner of Burma near the Siamese border. And more exciting even than these was the report of a creature, the Kung-lu (the Mouth-man), which has terrified the people for centuries. The Kung-lu, according to Thunderface, was a monster that resembled a gorilla, a miniature King Kong, about twenty feet tall. It lived on the highest mountains, where its trail of broken trees was often seen and descended into the villages only when it wanted meat, human meat. Elephants roamed hereabout, we learned, and we were told

also that no one in Kensi had been eaten by the Kung-lu for more years than the eldest could remember.

Despite this anti-climax the story was interesting because it was common all along the borders of Chinese Yunnan, French Indo-China, and Siam. Another curious thing about it was that the Mouth-man never ate fat people, as one would expect, but the very thinnest of them; what he liked was bones.

Jack disdainfully went over our small arsenal of revolvers, deploring the lack of any proper gun, and chose Armand's Colt .45 as the best available weapon for Mouth-men, tiger, or rhinoceros. All night he kept vigil in a thick clump of brush outside the village, until about three a.m., when the rest of us were shaken in our cots by the sound of a shot. Jack crept back to the tents with a giant frog in his hand.

"There's your Mouth-man," said he. "Thought he might make a nice gift for the lady's god."

Hsa-pu was so pleased with this gallant gesture that we could no longer doubt her promise to let us film the Naga rite if the weather cleared. If it cleared. The period we spent at Kensi waiting is the sort that is usually skipped in the tales of explorers, and rarely envisaged by those who think of exploration as high adventure. We sat and soaked, bored to tears. Gloomily we slopped through the village to try to learn something of the half-drugged people whom Thunder-face had aptly called "decayed." There wasn't much to learn. They were a branch of the Muhso tribe, it seemed, which made a wretched living smuggling opium and *bhang* across the borders of the three frontiers near Kensi. They were not always so languid with drugs as on our first day, apparently because that was a ceremonial occasion, but they were never sprightly. If we wanted chickens, for instance, we had to give them twenty-four hours' notice so that they could debate the matter and, finally, irresolutely capture them. If we wanted a jungle fowl the hunters would first deliberate, eventually

shoot the bird with their pellet bows, then excise the bones from it and return them to the place of the kill, for otherwise the *nats* would prevent all future hunting. Eventually we ate.

Our most careful questioning, relayed through Thunderface and Gongue's mahout, failed to elicit any satisfactory answer as to the origin of the Naga cult in Kensi. Whether it had come from India across Burma or via the ancient Khmer kingdoms of Cambodia and Siam was a dilemma equally tenable by either horn. There were of course no written records, and with the exception of the winding, snake-like staircase there was no sculpture which could give us a clue. The staircase resembled somewhat the Naga causeways of Angkor Thom. It also resembled any practical, carefully built path up any mountainside.

Of more immediate interest to us was the problem of why a village of seventy people should have had no sons born in it for over a year.

It was a curse, we were told by one old woman, a curse of the *nats* because one of their favourite trees had been carelessly burned. She was certain, however, that the Naga could remove this curse. The infant mortality of Kensi seemed in general to be very high. Back and forth across the stream at the edge of Kensi there ran many fine threads whose significance baffled me for some time. It was finally explained that children were buried on the farther shore and these threads had been stretched from tree to tree across the stream so that the small ghosts could hold to them when coming to visit their parents.

The rain at last abated sufficiently for us to film Hsa-pu's strange ritual. We worked feverishly, Roy and Armand with the two big moving picture cameras and the sound recorder, I with the Leicas and Ikontas.

We were a considerably shaken expedition after making the close-ups of that fourteen-foot King Cobra's venomous head. We made tests in the evening, as we did for every scene,

developing about eight inches of the exposed film in a Leica tank. It was good, said Roy; focus, exposure, composition. The piece of film we developed showed Hsa-pu's head and the snake's almost filling the frame with that deific kiss.

We were jubilant. This was rare material, and we took it as an augury of better things along the Burma-Yunnan Highway which we should now follow into China.

Thunderface left us in Kensi, for he had his own village to attend to, said he, and the quicksands to guard. We watched him regretfully, as he turned from us, that lost redskin, high aboard an elephant in the Burma jungles.



10 The Bitter Burma Road

IT WAS PLEASANT, I was thinking, to be in the cars again and travelling on what approximated to a road. I leaned on the wheel contentedly and lapped the chicken-fat from my fingers. Armand called from his car:

"Hasn't Roy come back yet?"

"You know Roy."

Gone again. We should have expected it. As this was dacoit country, the domain of the professional murderers who trade death with knives, it was imperative to reach Lashio that night. We should not have stopped to lunch and so allow our precious cameraman a journey into the woods, alone, when the tales of Eric Gongue were still curdling our blood. We should have known that if Roy were permitted into the fantasy of the Burma jungle he might go on for hours, like Goldilocks, from flower to flower and bug to bug until we caught up with him, for dacoits meant nothing to this mild-mannered fellow who filmed charging lions or lean cannibals without a quaver.

Dacoits, however, meant something to us who had sat up half the previous night listening to Gongue's tale of the woman who had been divided neatly in two, like a mackerel, just a week ago on this same road when she refused to contribute to the begging bowl of what seemed a *bona fide* monk; her son had escaped with only one ear. And there was the other tale of the truck drivers, bound for China with munitions, who had given a lift to a conjuror and were delighted when he offered to pay for the ride with his sword-swallowing act; one of the drivers had swallowed that sword. There was another tale too, of a teak plantation manager, an Englishman, who was coming to pay his coolies with a bag of rupees. He had been knocked from his elephant by a well-aimed stone and set upon. That was just nine days ago.

We blew our horns without avail. There was no sign of Roy. We spread out through the woods to track him down, yelling as we went and each suspecting dacoits in the stumbling of the others. Only Armand, looming six feet four above the undergrowth, was unmistakably one of us. It was he who found the spoor: broken bushes and a fragment of biscuit.

"Roy! Hello, Roy!"

"Yes," came the distant answer, polite but quite uninterested.

"They're starved, the poor little fellers," he said when we found him at last, crouched over an ant hill. "Famished," he added, and continued to crumble his cracker over the ants until we moved in a body upon him and led him back to the cars.

China was our destination now, and Lashio ahead was the terminal town of the great Burma-Yunnan Highway which we should travel, a highway unsurpassed as a feat of hasty engineering. When Japan blocked the ports of China there remained only three possible routes for the transportation of munitions to Chungking: by rail and road through French

Indo-China ; by the old silk road from Russia ; and along the tribute route of Marco Polo's time from Burma. This last was the most practicable, for it connected with Rangoon by rail, over British territory, and offered least chance of interference by the Japanese.

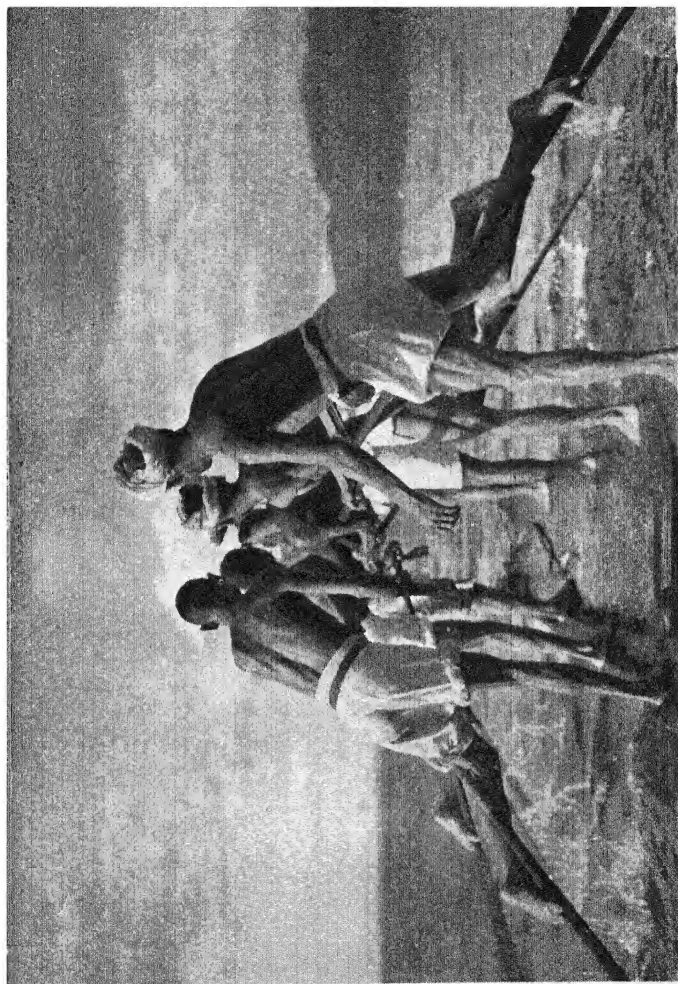
One hundred and sixty thousand coolies were conscripted from the fields to dig this highway, for the most part with their bare hands, home-made chisels and bamboo scoops the size of dustpans, slaving under appalling conditions of health in malarial country that is mountainous and almost impenetrably jungled. But the road was somehow made, and eight thousand trucks were roaring along it to Chungking before the break of the torrential monsoon. China prayed that it would last through the rains. We were going to find out, in view of future expeditions, whether this short cut to the heart of Asia would be at all seasons traversable.

It hardly looked promising to-night, as we ploughed through the muddy porridge of it with the hot rain sizzling at our windshields. But we were tired, and luckily we could not imagine the heart-breaking roads of China and Nepal which we should have to travel later.

Though there were ninety-five miles between Lashio and the border you felt that here was the jumping-off place for Yunnan, one of the least known and most primitive provinces of China. The town was split down the middle : on the Burma side lay peace ; there was no hurrying ; people looked forward to no greater excitement than the market once every five days. The Kachin women from the hills would come down then, with large squares of silver sewn to their black blouses and rings of cane around their hips. The slight Shan women with exquisite ivory faces would squat dreaming over their vegetables, a medley of brilliant peppers, mushrooms with caps the size of a nickel and stems six inches long, twisted gourds, turnips as white and crisp as icicles. In the afternoons the natty little Burmese troops would parade



PADAUNG WOMAN, "GIRAFFE-NECK" CIRCLED BY BRASS



THE LEG-ROWERS OF LAKE INLE

through the streets to the Scotch tunes of a bagpipe incongruously but proudly blown by their leader. And at night the odour of linden, as heavy as talc, weighed upon us.

But New Lashio was alive. The railway yard, the last of the Burma line, was jammed with freight cars, all labelled EXPLOSIVE, which would transfer their contents to the trucks plying towards the war. And the trucks, a mile-long line of them, waited like a file of shabby assassins across the raw, new town with its thatched shops. At the northern edge stood a military guard. This marked the end of peace, and civilians could not pass.

It was here that Armand and Quentin and I went to look for a cook among the ill-lit eating dens and the ferocious small soldiery.

A male cook we wanted, someone handy with a cleaver, but even Quentin could not make them understand. We sat drinking Shan tea with salt in it while emissaries went forth into China to our right and Burma to our left. A dapper half-caste with a little goatee that had a circle of birds tattooed around it leaned suddenly across his table and whispered: "You like nice Shan wife, please, can cook?"

This scene, I thought, had often been rehearsed, for we were kept waiting no more than a minute before not one but eleven Shan wives responded to the half-caste's whistle. They came from all directions, pert and clean and dainty as mice, and they all sat round the broker's table and promptly ordered tea.

"They want to marry Englishman, please," he said. "First time piecee," he added cryptically, pointing with his goatee at them. "You like? Can cook too." The mice went on sipping and chattering politely among themselves, with never a glance at us. Four hundred rupees apiece, about one hundred and thirty dollars, would buy them outright, we were informed.

The girls had heard the word "rupees" and were getting

restless now. The one nearest to Armand began to edge her chair closer, and to avert invasion he spoke very loudly.

"What we want is a male cook, a man, really. Something like you," he said with a grimace.

"Me? Me? I come!" said the little fellow, waving his goatee in a circle so that the tattooed birds seemed to fly around it. "You rent me forty rupees a month, yes? I come fine!" And following his goatee he darted to the kitchen where we could hear a great clatter of pots and pans being assembled.

We took him, more from desperation than confidence, for we were eager to start for China. His name was Yang-Houhsiao, Yang-the-Little-Wart.

"If he can't cook, we can send him back from the border," Quentin grumbled.

But his first meal was a triumph, though it had only one course to it. We had left Lashio at last, and on a sunlit day, with a convoy of one hundred and eighty-nine trucks loaded with munitions and T.N.T. We were not comfortable driving our three peaceful cars in the middle of it, but the Shan bandits seemed the greater danger. We drove through high Kutkai, over bare hills so tall in the twilight that you felt they were not of the earth, but floating above it, bearing us. The Kachins walked buoyantly here, swinging along beside their buffaloes, their short, wide trousers flapping in the crisp wind. We descended to forests that were filled with trumpet-shaped flowers of pale blue and yellow, and flowers hard as buttons, and strange blossoms built one within another like pagoda roofs. We had the cook's trial dinner at the edge of a precipice. The river wound through vines five hundred feet below, and five hundred feet straight up over our heads the mountain still ascended to the heights where, said the cook, the bandits lived. But his superb cabbage soup took our minds from them; we lived on cabbage soup thereafter, for it was all our cook could cook.

Through Musé and Manwhé it rained continually, yet there was no water but the rain to drink, for the streams were infected and the one strong river was far below. Good as they were, the cars boiled going over those precipitous passes. We came to Wan Ting, the customs station, in the late afternoon, and while we argued interminably over passports and our right to purchase petrol from the troops, the great caravans for the north passed us by: the bullock caravans, and the buffaloes, and the long mule trains. We wanted to film these but the driver of the mules would not at first allow it, for his animals would be dead on the film, he explained, and so afflict the live ones. "Listen, these are *moving* pictures," Quentin assured him, and after a while the Black Yunnanese consented to one quick shot.

The bamboo barrier was lifted and we entered China. We had tea, at China's expense, while Armand was forced to accept the services of two of the dreaded Black Guard of China, "to protect you from bandits," they said, but actually to prevent photographs of the Burma-Yunnan road. They were dressed in black, with black spiked helmets and great automatic pistols that made the little fellows limp. I doubt that they could lift them to their shoulders, but they were useful as a threat to bandits. The customs station had been attacked and razed three times during the last eight months, not by professional dacoits but by natives from both sides of the border who were hungry and ill and would unquestionably barter part of the loot for the greater prize, quinine.

We drove on towards Chefang with sinking spirits. Petrol we had obtained, a miracle of Armand's diplomacy, but we were expressly forbidden to use the cameras despite the arrangements we had made in Washington with the Chinese Embassy. Our appeals to Dr. Kung and T. L. Soong had brought no answer to the border station, and we who had hoped to make a film sympathetic to China now felt nothing but hostility on every side. Bandits, poverty, disease, the

escort of explosive trucks, rain, mud, night, the sinister little soldiers riding with us, prepared us properly for our reception in Chefang.

When the first explosion rocked our cars we were sure the Japanese had come at last, and I regretted not having been more helpful to Leila when she was tormented by the problem of cutting out five-pointed stars for the American flags she was sewing. Those flags, in consequence, were not yet upon our roofs to identify us to Japanese airmen. Armand's car stopped ahead of mine with the next explosion. There were flares to our left and figures running.

"If the cars are attacked," we had been told, "get out of them and lie flat in a ditch." My door was half open when I saw Quentin striding nonchalantly towards me.

"It's all right. It's the road-workers. Dynamiting. Swing your lights to the left and we'll watch them."

The coolies of the night shift were straightening a bend in the cliff face, while one of them tamped gunpowder carelessly into a bamboo tube. A crude fuse was added and the infernal machine dropped into the hole.

We watched nervously, and I didn't realize that I had subconsciously shifted the car to reverse until the back wheels dropped into a ditch. Both crews now had taken shelter, flat on their stomachs, behind one of the huge stone road rollers which were hewn of a single block and usually drawn by a score of men. One little Chinese alone was moving around with a flare in his hand, approaching the fuse tentatively and drawing away again. He held the flare at arm's length.

Then the explosion came. The night caved in upon us. Mud and leaves came hurtling over the spot where a man had just then been.

"Wow!" said Quentin. It seemed a conservative expletive, but it may have been Chinese.

Leila was already scrambling towards the shattered cliff,

the medicine kit in her hand. There was a great hole ahead, a superb job of blasting, but the coolie was nowhere around. The others shrugged and made some talk of China. They were right, said Quentin. Maybe they lost a man a week like this. But it was for China, and his sacrifice on the highway construction was a more effective blow to Japan than many a triumphant battle. We returned to the cars saying nothing at all.



The Men of Mud II

IT WAS MIDNIGHT when the twisted black of the jungle was broken by the geometric black of a sudden village. Our lights shone on another bamboo barrier across the road, and behind the bamboo were a dozen blue-jacketed military police, their guns and bayonets levelled at us. We showed our pass from Wan Ting and were permitted to enter. Quentin interpreted.

"Put out the lights. They're afraid of planes. This is an ammunition dump, I imagine."

Then we were forgotten, apparently. We sat in the dark listening to muffled voices and watching shadows—their bayonets faintly glimmering—massing and separating to go on secret errands. A pagoda roof rose in steps of darkness over our heads, and down the single rutted street of the village we saw the dim glow of shops.

I started to smoke, and instantly a hand shot from the darkness and slapped the cigarette from my mouth. This was too much. We were half dead with sleep and hunger and in no mood to sit waiting the will of these toy soldiers. Armand climbed out of his car, a monstrous apparition to the little men. The rest of us followed and moved in a body to a shop that

looked as if it might purvey some sort of food. And surrounded by a ring of tight, cruel, military faces we drank rice wine ladled from an earthen pot, and ate fried rice till we could hold no more.

When we left we were herded through the mud by our reinforced guard. They would not talk to Quentin, and we had no idea what they intended to do with us. We wondered if our pass was valid to take us on to Mongshih. Or would we be held here, virtually prisoners, until in Buddha's good time someone with sufficient authority and intelligence came along to release us?

We were herded through alleys and courtyards, through a litter of invisible pigs, to an abandoned temple where a lamp was burning. We stood uneasily on the steps, peering into the open doors of the shacks surrounding it.

"Jeez! Dave!" Jack nudged me. I slipped to one side. "It's a joint!" he whispered. We looked through a door and saw a spirit lamp by a rattan bed. And on the bed lay a nude Chinese, a carcass of scabs, with an opium pipe beside him. My rice revolved within me. Quentin, an ardent advocate of China's New Life movement, had maintained that opium-smoking no longer existed in China, but Yunnan Province was barely China still, and he too was to see the horrors of addiction before our trip was done.

That night we slept together on a porch of the temple courtyard, beneath a green and scarlet mural dragon that threatened, like China itself, to swallow us usurpers into its coils. It was not cosy. We started awake at four the next morning when Armand's evil alarm clock, of Japanese origin, went chattering across the dark. There were a dozen cries in answer to it as a dozen soldiers sprang from their beds around us. The porch had been filled with them while we slept.

We saw instantly the danger of wakening Chinese troops with a Japanese gong, particularly these who were recruited from the most primitive coolies of Yunnan Province. Their

souls had been travelling during the night and might have been caught outside their bodies by such a rude awakening. We passed the clock from hand to hand, still ringing like the bells of hell, until it was finally decided that the thing was harmless and all souls were accounted for.

Chefang was grim in the morning rain, a jumble of decrepit houses with curling eaves and roofs of tile. Moss grew upon them, soft as a mist, and dribbled black slime down the mouldering walls. Old women sat just inside their doors, watching us beadily, their legs limp and monstrous, for their feet were so tightly bound that they looked like hoofs. Three goats whose ribs were warped far out on both sides with pregnancy nuzzled the mud around our cars.

It was a village of the old and the cruel and the evil, where no children played and even the adolescent soldiers had the look of men to whom hate and lust were the only emotions known. They gestured us through the barbed-wire gate of the South-west Transportation Company's ammunition dump, their right hands clutching their Mausers while with their left they examined the document, which Armand had received at Wan Ting, permitting us to buy army petrol. Grey-uniformed sentries, like vultures, watched our every move from jerry-built towers.

Leila was puffing unconcernedly upon a Chinese cigarette when the nearest guard emitted a ferocious yell and snatched it from her lips. Snarling, he backed away till he found a secluded angle between two sheds full of T.N.T., where he cupped the cigarette in both hands and sucked at it avidly.

"You will, will you?" Jack growled, approaching him with a twelve-inch spanner. But he was too late. Across the yard like a miniature thunderbolt came a dwarf of an officer. There was a slushing sound as his fist pulped the soldier's nose. He picked up the cigarette from the mud, snuffed it, pocketed it and methodically set about beating the wretch who stood paralysed at attention. His hat was knocked over his eyes ;

blood blotched his face as the brutal punishment went on, but he moved not an inch. The dwarf slashed and slashed at him, until slowly he careened backwards to the wall of the shed. But he was still standing, the hat hiding his anguish, when we drove sickened away.

The ghost of him went with us, poking at our hearts whenever we thought well of China, when we watched with respect the coolie soldiers drilling, or admired the few retention walls of the road, or when, in the mountains, we looked thousands of feet down into green and silver valleys that were meticulously cultivated for rice. China, smiling, was not a kindly land.

The road wound up to six thousand feet, with curves so abrupt that we sometimes wondered if we were not returning on the road we had climbed. At one curve out of ten we would find tyre tracks leading straight out into the air, and far below we would see the fragments of what had been a truck laden with China's arms. Underpaid and undernourished, driving through monsoon rains without windshield wipers or even jacks for changing tyres, flogging their nerves with rice wine and opium to endure the grind, the young truck drivers could scarcely be expected to keep to the road when soft air and death in the valley confronted them at every turn.

"Judas! Watch that road!" Roy yelled at me. I swerved back onto it, shook the sleep from my eyes and gripped the wheel till my palms ached.

The mountains hid the sun by four o'clock, and in that twilight we struggled for a tyre-hold in the rutted mud, a sort of gumbo which seemed composed of mucilage and vaseline. It caked the wheels to the mudguards, yet it was impossible to drive straight through it. Again and again our rear wheels skidded to the edge of the cliff and we had either to be dragged back to the road by the lorry or to straighten our course with block and tackle attached to trees. The

munitions trucks hooted and passed us, one hundred and eighty-nine of them, ploughing up the road until it looked like the surface of the moon. We teetered through ruts whose walls reached far above our hubs, many so deep that it was only by the laborious laying of planks that we got through at all. We could not forget that we were now in the heart of the bandit country and that if we bogged down we could well expect trouble from the mountain men. We dug at the ruts with bare hands and cursed the coolies who should have cared for the road as they valued their country's life. And we men of mud laughed, perhaps hysterically, when our protectors of the dreaded Black Guard were simultaneously sick over the edge of the cliff.

We must reach Mongshih. As Armand's car ahead looped round a corner and across my headlights I could see him, tense as a gargoyle, leaning half out the window to squint through the rain. Leila's wet hair was streaming from the other side. Quentin, soaked, sprawled across the roof. One slip here would find the expedition ended in the valley.

The road improved slightly as we approached Mongshih at last, and when we stopped at the file of straggled huts that was called a village Jack was again singing "Home on the Range" in his wild Irish bass. We had tea, with the information that since there were no inns here we would camp most safely in the Chinese cemetery, because the bandits, maybe, would be afraid of ghosts.

This was the Valley of the Shadow of Death, a rotting land beneath the rains. The graveyard with its paunchy little tombs seemed cheery in comparison to the view that greeted us in the morning. Two hundred trucks squatted in the mud ahead of our cars; three hundred more were jammed behind, for between here and Lung Ling, we learned, there were two great landslides that the rain had gouged from the mountains and spilled across the road, and the two bridges between them had just that night been sloughed away.

There was nothing for it but to wait hopefully day after day for three weeks, believing, but with diminishing returns, that China must soon repair this major artery. It rained. The valley began to flood, and soon we could no longer see the chequer-board boundaries of the rice-fields. They were sheets of water, gradually rising until two inches of rain lay stagnant on the floors of our tents. Fortunately it stayed at that level, for we were beginning to worry about the corpses amidst which we were camped.

We ate our cabbage soup, which still seemed to be the only dish our cook could cook, and waited gloomily each night for the return of whichever member of the expedition had spent the day at the first landslide. But his report scarcely varied. "Five male coolies, twenty-three women and a dozen kids pecking at it with little bamboo scoops. They don't even make a dent in it. They boil plain water for lunch. Not even tea to put in it. God! Have we any of that awful rice wine left?"

We apportioned the wine carefully and read miserable fortunes in the dregs of the cabbage soup. We sweated over scenarios with an ear and an eye always cocked towards that sinister road. "Look," Leila would say, "there goes another one!" Caught in the bright fingers of our flashlights we would see another ragged peasant plodding through the mud with a limp figure upon his back, plodding over the mountains to Lung Ling where the only doctor within three hundred miles would tell him that the malaria was too far advanced to cure. Though quinine, furnished by the League of Nations Commission, was available even at Mongshih, the coolie would have been using bear gall as a cure, and forcing his sick relative to inhale the smoke of burning dung.

Our single hope of escape was that the dynamite truck, the only one on this long section of road, would arrive with sufficient coolies to blast away the slides and repair the two bridges if they, like the rest, were not already bogged down

in mud and opium. The drivers of the munitions trucks smoked opium openly, lying with their knees in air upon the seats of their cubicles. We had seen the black tar-like balls of the stuff, passed from man to man like plugs of tobacco, and when the wind shifted the sweet stench of it spread through the camp. We had trudged back to Mongshih, seeking any food but cabbage, and found shopkeepers drugged behind their pitiful little handfuls of peppers and beans.

This was the Valley of Death, whose shadow lay upon all who were luckless enough, or, like the bandits desperate enough to live there. China's arms were mired within it.

The coolies of the Mongshih district were too ill or languid with opium to work on the road and none would come to the valley from farther away as they knew the malignant malaria would mean their death. Nor would the officials, nor the police, nor the trained engineers of the north come down although great rewards were offered. Force was useless; the men simply ran away, and their guards soon followed.

The truck drivers? Ah, no. That mercenary rabble of Burmese, Hindus, and black Yunnanese, working for sixty-five rupees (£5) per month, had troubles of their own. As no provision had been made to feed them they stole their food. The doors of every village were closed when they passed through with the loads of explosives which were meant to protect those same villages from Japan. The drivers broke them open, pillaged to their stomachs' content and beat ruthlessly those who opposed them, knowing that their own fate would be far worse if they failed through weakness to get their precious cargo to Kunming.

Two American lads, Herbert and Richard, were the leaders of the convoy encamped with us, a pair of jaunty youngsters who called themselves the Foreign Legion of China.

"Arthur was the best driver of us all, when we first came out," said Richard, "but the Black Guard killed him." He

glowered at our own Black Guard, those surly savages who were forever polishing the spikes on their helmets. "Old Arthur went over a bump and lost one four-inch shell. He didn't notice it, but they checked at Kunming. They shot him through both eyes."

Herbert stooped to look beneath the table. "Good Lord, you're barefooted!" I lifted my feet from the crossbar and showed the raw red skin that had resulted from two weeks' soaking in the rain. Our boots had leaked from continual immersion, and now it was agony even to put on socks.

"I'll fix that," said Herbert. "Pass up your feet." From a hip pocket, where he had sat on it, he produced an oilskin pouch filled with a noisome grease. "Duck fat," he explained, "and a herb called 'oo.'" He anointed our twelve feet, toe by toe, rubbing his mess into them as gently as might a mother, and when we slid into our socks there was miraculously no pain at all. They caught the ducks, he explained, by swimming under water through the flooded paddy-fields and pulling them down. The peasants who had seen their birds disappear before their eyes had already made a fearful legend of the invisible duck men. It was no wonder that the munitions trucks got scant welcome.

"I don't suppose," said Herbert, "you'd know anybody in Iowa, would you?"

"Iowa? I don't believe so," Armand replied.

Herbert smiled and turned to Leila. "Do you like stories?"

"I love them. Why?"

"Well, I know a lad from Iowa out here. His whole life was such a story as the *Arabian Nights* is made of. It still is, I believe, judging from the letters he sends me occasionally. We fought the Japs together when I first came out. Then I lost track of him. Then he wrote me a year ago from Kwe-hua-ting, a long letter. I don't believe a word of it, of course, but knowing Don I can't doubt it either. Look here, it's a

filthy afternoon. Would it bore you to hear one of Don's wild stories?"

"We'd love it. Nothing could be better."

Herbert rested his spine on the tent post, his feet on a petrol tin, and began his tale. The rain upon the canvas roof gave dramatic emphasis to it.

"It's the story," said he, "of the pigs that paid the piper. Well, I imagine Don Duncan sighed . . ."

He was a good raconteur, and as he talked I gradually forgot his shabby clothes, his duck grease, the munitions he was driving to Kunming. The ballad-makers of Provence and the vagrant minstrels must have been very much like him.



Mademoiselle from 12 Kwe-hua-ting

I IMAGINE DON DUNCAN sighed as he looked back at the roofs of Kwe-hua-ting, the first and the last city at the edge of the Gobi Desert. He should have sighed when he looked back towards China which had sheltered him so hospitably, and so generously enriched him. Before him lay the Gobi, a thousand bitter miles of it, and beyond it lay Ta Kure, his journey's end, the City of Living Gods.

He prodded his camel to life and joined the departing caravan. The nine baby pigs would not follow him at first, but when he called to them, resonantly and deeply, they came galloping to his camel's heels. For Don Duncan was not only an expert poet and soldier and thief; he was an accomplished, a professional hog-caller, not the best from all Iowa but certainly the most versatile.

It had been his failure at the state hog-killing championship which had brought him, heart-broken, to the East, he would

tell you. But he could smile now as he recounted how he had lost, even though he had stolen his opponent's upper teeth ; and he had been beaten fairly, he would tell you, with the disarming smile that won him friends and enemies wherever he went.

The East had been gentle to him, though he had fought the war whole-heartedly, for pay, of course, in the ranks of both China and Japan. His thefts had gone unpunished and for the greater part undiscovered. Nor were they petty thefts ; when he stole the crystal back-scratcher, almost from the very back of a Japanese Major-General, all China had laughed for weeks.

His poetry, sung loudly in Iowa English, made his way for him through the Orient ; thievery paved that way with gold and filched porcelain and crystal ; and even with the failure of these two talents there was always soldiering to fall back upon. And there was hog-calling, of course.

Don Duncan nudged his camel and spoke imperatively to the nine baby pigs, those dear little fellows he had just won, and fairly too. Kwe-hua-ting had been a city too poor and pitiable to rob—even the Japanese despised it—nor did it appreciate his poetry. But when he stood in the central bazaar and shouted to all the pigs of Kwe-hua-ting, and the pigs came, the city acclaimed him.

Pigs of all colours and species came galloping to him from all directions, young Mongolian tuskers and grunting old sows, an army of pigs that stopped traffic for many hours. Everyone was delighted, naturally, and cheered him as he stood there, rather shyly, surrounded by enchanted swine. Coins were thrown to him, and flowers, and a child gave him a munched-on stick of candy.

Then an old sow trotted wheezily up to him followed by her nine young, and the peasant who was her owner wept explaining that months ago this sow had been stolen and he had not seen her since. He blessed Don Duncan eloquently and gave him the nine fat young.

For such friendliness as this Don Duncan sighed, as the caravan wound slowly over the Inshan Mountains and into the cruel desert. Night blew down upon them and they camped, and the day broke again, cold and gusty with an indifferent sun. And many nights and days that were no less bitter, one than the other, blew over them towards the warmth of Kwe-hua-ting.

The little pigs stood the journey well enough for several weeks, but they were growing rapidly and with expansion lost their speed. Then the caravan forged away from them and Don Duncan was obliged for some time to travel alone with his beloved beasts, until another caravan caught up with them from behind. He bought a skin of water, and this caravan passed also, and the pigs grew larger, and other caravans caught and passed them on the weary road to Ta Kure, the City of Living Gods.

Don Duncan was patient, for there was treasure in Ta Kure. He laughed at the frivolous thefts of his past; there in Ta Kure sat waiting for him the little Daunichi-Buddha whose hollow paunch was filled with pearls.

No one harmed the lone traveller or his pigs. The desert pirates thought him mad and therefore holy. None stopped him but an old Chahar woman who was living strangely alone among the dunes.

"I'll tell your fortune, stranger," she screamed. "I'll take the white and pink pig for your fortune, stranger."

"Ah, no," said Don Duncan. "She's my darling, she whom I call Mademoiselle. Tell me a lesser fortune and I'll give you a lesser pig."

The hag threw some gopher bones into the embers of her fire and scrutinized the charred markings on them.

"I see," said she, "a yellow girl awaiting you . . ."

"Girls!" laughed Don Duncan.

"And I see a flogging too, and you bound to the breast of Buddha . . ."

"Well, well, Buddha . . ." mused Don Duncan.

"And I advise you this: save the baby teeth of all your pigs as they fall out; put them in this pouch, wear it always, and fortune at last will come to you."

Don Duncan was very sad as he rode away with only eight pigs to follow him, and miserly he collected their teeth as they dropped out one by one. The camel trotted less comfortably. Mademoiselle developed spavin. There was a sand-storm that all but ripped his clothes to tatters, and shortly after it had passed two of his frailer pigs died.

There were days and weeks when he met no one at all, for this was winter now. An occasional caravan would pass and sell him water, but his lean pigs could not keep up with it. He feared for his sanity, so desolate the desert was, and he began to dream anxiously, even of the yellow girl and the flogging at Ta Kure that the witch had told about. He tossed in his sleep, and the six lean pigs sleeping beside him would grunt in sympathy. Mademoiselle never left his side.

Then a band of Russians, part of the mad Baron Ungern's army, with no respect for other madmen, swooped down upon him and took four pigs, but not before Don Duncan had filched the revolver of one of them. It was a heart-breaking but almost a fair exchange, he mused, as he travelled on with his two last pigs, for now he was able to shoot the marmots and partridges, and the succulent little *imouran*, the prairie dog of the Gobi.

He and Mademoiselle fattened, but the camel and the other pig, vegetarians both, wasted away. They lay down side by side one morning when the whole northern sky was fittingly obscured by cloud, and died.

Then the cloud lifted and Don Duncan saw before him the shining belt of the River Tola and beyond that the great Bogdo-Ol, the sacred mountain of Ta Kure.

He ran forward, stumbling and laughing hysterically with Mademoiselle reeling and grunting behind. They found

the market, with all its welcome viands, just opening as they arrived, and they didn't leave it until the sun was down.

This was the chosen city. This was the bright city of the plain that Jenghiz Khan had elected forever to be the home of beauty and holiness, where the Living Buddha, the Bogdo Khan, reigned over half the Mongol world.

Don Duncan planned carefully now that he had arrived. Strategy was essential, for not even he could hope to storm into the temple and abduct the little statue unopposed.

Several days he wandered through Ta Kure, appraising the people, seeking some national trait or weakness which might help him towards his end; but in this City of Living Gods where almost everyone he met was an incarnated Buddha, or an unapproachable monk, or an alien, he found suspicion everywhere.

It was a picturesque, polyglot people: gaunt Lamas with yellow or red robes and red or yellow bonnets cut in the most amazing patterns, Tartars in black overcoats and small black velvet caps, sinister-looking Olets, the magic people, whose gowns were embroidered with gold. Occasionally a Tzuren, one of the Bogdo Khan's poisoners, would slip silently through the crowd, and all knew him by his fingernails and the fact that he was dumb.

Don Duncan shuddered and unconsciously raised his hand to the little pouch slung around his neck. He knew—for his was the felicity to believe in witches—that those baby pig teeth would save him in the end, even from the poisoned nails of the Tzurens. And without a second thought of them he called Mademoiselle and started for the temple of the Living Buddha.

High above the city, on the mountain Bogdo-Ol, it lay, glittering white before the sun, and the paths to its various shrines were choked with pilgrims, some on camels, some in ox carts with growling wooden wheels, very many on foot.

Don Duncan and Mademoiselle passed them impatiently and soon stood in the temple yard.

There was no time to be lost now. Hesitation might mean discovery. Don Duncan winked at Mademoiselle and bellowed out mightily the ancient chant of the hog-caller. He bellowed towards the temple, and towards the great pagoda on the neighbouring hill, and towards the city far below. He bellowed, you would say, to all Mongolia, so powerful was that cry.

There was a moment of silence; the climbing pilgrims paused; a window in the temple was flung open and two startled faces, an old man's and a girl's, peered down at Don Duncan. Then from every gate pigs came galloping into the temple yard.

The hill was covered with them and the pilgrims were bowled over as the beasts rushed headlong to the call of their alien master, until soon the yard was full. Don Duncan disdained the several priests who bowed low to him, but he did remove his hat to the old man and the girl at the window, recognizing his holiness and her beauty. And he let the day's work go at that.

He and Mademoiselle slept happily there that night, and many of the pigs with them, for there is a law of Bogdo-Ol that whosoever comes to the temple yard, man or beast, shall find welcome in these, the god's, preserves. And the next day Don Duncan called forth again the pigs of all the land, those who had departed during the night and those who had not heard him the first time, and they came galloping.

Now again the old man and the girl were at the window, and among the crowd surrounding Don Duncan were multi-coloured priests who bowed whenever he noticed them. He noticed too the Tzurens, the ordained poisoners.

And that night as he and Mademoiselle lay contentedly in a corner of the temple yard, watching the stars and planning, there came to him a girl dressed as a slave with a slave's

shameful veil. But Don Duncan knew her to be the daughter of the Living Buddha, the Bogdo Khan, she who had stared at him so prettily from the window.

"I am told you are a very holy man," she said. "But it is strange you are so young."

Don Duncan laughed softly and thought that never in his life had he seen such beauty as lay behind that lucent veil. "Won't you sit with me awhile?" he said. "This is Mademoiselle."

She sat by him with no embarrassment and held Mademoiselle's long snout upon her knee. He talked to her of Iowa, the corn that grew there, the cabbages. He honestly told her of the woeful pig-piping competition which had sent him—always seeking—to Ta Kure. Then he paused and she put her hand on his, thinking to understand his sorrow.

The next day he called the pigs again into the temple yard, and the Bogdo Khan sent him a *batyk*, a strip of beautiful blue silk, but whether as an emblem of esteem or a bribe to discontinue his pig collecting Don Duncan did not know. Nor did he accept the great Bogdo's invitation to pass the night in the temple; he waited in the yard until the girl Kwanung came.

She said, "I should like a token of you when you go, Don Duncan. Will you not give me Mademoiselle? In all Mongolia there is no other pink and white spotted pig, nor such a gentle one."

And he said, "I would give you a poem, Kwanung, one of my best, or I would steal for you the finest Buddha, but Mademoiselle I'll need for comfort when at last I have to leave you."

"Ah, but the finest Buddha in all the world, the Daunichi-Buddha, is here," exclaimed Kwanung. "So you'd give me only a poem?"

It was not easy to convince her of a poem's eternal value, even by recitation; she was absently scratching Mademoiselle's

ear. Don Duncan put his arm around her, very casually, and folded her two small hands against her heart. His own heart was pounding, but whether from love or avarice he did not know.

"I wonder," he said, "if I, a heathen, could see your Buddha . . ."

She hesitated a long time, turning in his arms to look at him. "I shall come for you to-morrow night," she said at last.

Then they both were silent, watching the stars above Ta Kure, and listening to the eccentric pulses of their blood.

And the next morning as usual he sang out across the mountain, and all the pigs came galloping. Half the populace of Ta Kure was there to cheer him for a mighty god, and the Bogdo sent two *batyks* of yellow silk with a note saying that the performance had been fine, and would he please drop in again next year if he were passing by? Plainly the Bogdo was piqued, so Don Duncan kept a severe eye on the closer Tzurens.

But at evening the crowd left him, and even the Tzurens, fearing the boy's Iowan magics, slipped away, and he was alone at midnight when Kwanung came.

"Quick," she said. "Put on these robes."

He wrapped himself in the voluminous gaudy garments of a monk and jammed the conical dunce-cap upon his head. "You wait here, Mademoiselle." They slipped into the temple and down a dark corridor. The monks on guard scarcely glanced at them once they had recognized Kwanung. They passed numerous alcoves wherein as many Buddhas sat contemplating Karma through their paunches. Tapers were burning before them, and monks in fantastic robes were making obeisance. Kwanung turned her key in the door of the inner sanctum.

Here, Don Duncan saw, as the door closed softly, was the goal of the Buddhist world, the last refuge for all the exquisite

and contested relics of this world's faith. At the far end of the hall, dimly lighted, sat a colossal golden Buddha upon a golden lotus; hundreds of lesser idols surrounded him, Buddhas carved in jade and crystal. And here too were silver idols of the Hindu Trimurti in all their avatars. Every god of every land had here found sanctuary at the feet of the giant Buddha; even Christ and His cross were here.

"This is the Daunichi-Buddha, the finest in the world," said Kwanung, leading him to a separate shrine.

Don Duncan's breath came fast as he touched the figurine, a tiny marvel of amber and gold. He held it to his cheek for a moment and tipped it slightly; he heard the click of the pearls within. Then, as if watching the act of another, he saw his own hand tremblingly replace the Buddha in its shrine; and his mind reeled with terror, and he hid his face against the shoulder of Kwanung.

"Oh, Kwanung, I am not worthy to adore you as I do, I a caller of swine and a poor poet, and a thief. But come with me, Kwanung, and give me my chance again. Come away with me, Kwanung."

She clung to him very close, engirt by his silken robes. He thought the taper flames wavered and the little gods stirred dizzily around them.

"You are only very foolish, Don Duncan," she murmured, "and so perhaps you are holy as they say. But you must go now, alone. I could not help to change you. You would only become a better thief, and a worse poet probably . . . and your pigs would ignore me, all save Mademoiselle. . . . Ah, Don Duncan, take the Buddha that you covet. It was stolen by my father, and stolen before; it has no rightful shrine. Take the Buddha and give me Mademoiselle as a token of you."

"I came here as a thief, not a tradesman," he said bitterly.

She led him to the door, and he followed dumbly, as a child frightened by its own disguise. She led him to the

temple yard. "Look, there is a camel waiting for you. Go quickly, for my father doubts you, even though the people and all the priests believe you to be a god. Lives are trifles on Bogdo-Ol."

Don Duncan without a word cut off half his camel's rein. One end he tied to the foreleg of Mademoiselle and the other he gave to Kwanung.

"So long." The camel lurched to its foot and trotted away.

"Yes, so . . . long," she called softly.

The city was an unreal city, a grotesque mirage beneath the moon. Don Duncan felt that he and his camel and the great heart wallowing against his ribs must all be spectres of some transient dream. He hurried to the city walls and because of his monk's raiment passed unchallenged. He sped south across the desert along the old road to Kwe-hua-ting.

The camel was a refractory beast that bumped him high up and viciously down against a hard roll in the blanket that served as saddle. He put his hand beneath him to smooth the roll, and withdrew it with the little Daunichi-Buddha.

Had he been so dazed, he wondered, that he unconsciously stole the idol? Had he held Kwanung close to him, adoring her, just to filch it behind her back? Never, he groaned, never. She alone could have hidden it there.

Then suddenly there were shouts behind him, and the plunk of hoofs on the crusty desert sand. He was discovered. The crowd of yowling Mongols soon caught up with him, and tying his wrists around the camel's neck dragged him painfully back to Ta Kure.

There at the gate Mademoiselle was waiting, she who must unwittingly have betrayed him. Mademoiselle followed grunting up the hill of Bogdo-Ol, and she was permitted with him in the hall of the thousand gods.

Kwanung was there, and a drunken old man, the Bogdo Khan. Priests in outlandish costumes surrounded him; and

gongs were being rung and flutes blown hideously. Kwanung looked at Don Duncan with love and terror in her dark eyes, and his eyes dropped to the floor where were the prints of Mademoiselle's hoofs leading from the door to an empty shrine and back again.

"You have found it?" demanded the Bogdo. His fat hand trembled as he took the Buddha and shook it against his ear. "Ah . . ." he murmured contentedly. "Flog him to death."

Kwanung screamed, and her father jerked her to him and covered her mouth. The boy was strapped to the enormous golden Buddha at the end of the hall, and three priests swung their knouts against him.

"Stop, stop! In the name of Buddha spare him!" screamed Kwanung. "I am the thief, not he!" The priests paused in their frightful work, and Kwanung reeled to her father's knee. "Oh, forgive me, and forgive my loving him. It was I who gave him the Daunichi-Buddha. Oh, banish me if you will, but let him go with me. Great Buddha, forgive this treason!"

The old Bogdo, trembling, reached with one hand for his goblet of wine and with the other for the little idol. Again he shook it, and put it carefully down. He struck the girl to the floor and tossed the goblet after her.

"Let them go," he said wearily. "And see that they go far. . . ."

They went out together, and as Don Duncan turned back briefly he saw a high priest leading Mademoiselle away; there was a silk *batyk* upon her back, and her throat was hung with golden bells—Mademoiselle who had restored the Buddha.

They were given camels and led under guard to the city gates. They trotted into the desert without a word.

"This," said Kwanung at last, with a gesture to the arid dunes, "must be our home. And very soon it may be our grave, but I am content, Don Duncan."

Don Duncan laughed and turned his camel for a last glance

at the moonlit city. "Dear small Kwanung . . . look at your city once, then see what I have for you here."

From the witch's purse about his neck he spilled a dozen pearls into her extended hand. "Here you see the accomplished magic of changing pearls into the baby teeth of swine. The Daunichi-Buddha will not care; the teeth in his paunch will help him digest such magics. . . . Ah, but you have a very god of a husband, Kwanung. Now we shall sleep, and to-morrow we'll buy passage with some caravan, and we'll live happily ever after in Kwe-hua-ting. . . . Are you not sleepy, Kwanung?"

"Let's ride on. I'm afraid of magics now, Don Duncan." . . .

So they rode on, and lived happily ever after in Kwe-hua-ting.



13 The Last Laugh

"WELL, HERBERT DON DUNCAN," said Richard, grinning, "your fairy tale improves as you lengthen it. Do you know," he turned to us, "Herbert did steal the Buddha, but the rattle in its paunch was just three Chinese pennies, with holes in them, for it was a child's bank really, made in Berlin; and he did leave Ta Kure with the small Kwanung, which was the Chinese name for a nice old missionary lady; and he's a champion hog-caller, so he says . . ."

Herbert laughed and rubbed his duck-greasy hands in Richard's hair. "Materialist! Wouldn't you really rather believe my tale? I almost do myself. Life is so dull," said this young filibuster.

"Look here, would you like to ride up to the slide with us? But don't let those Black Boogies see you go."

We lurched away with our truckload of T.N.T., careering through rain towards a sunset invitingly clear above Pao Shan, that bitter village whose gate was inscribed: "Let All Who Enter Here Say Farewell to Their Beloved Ones, and to Their Health and Businesses, for This Is an Accursed Place."

We skidded round precipitous corners. We roared up and down slopes of solid mud, bouncing in and out of ruts so violently that our T.N.T. cases jumped clear into the air and banged down again with more than force enough, I thought, to explode them.

"Look out for that truck!" I yelled. Richard slammed on the brakes and we skidded obliquely towards the cliff, crashed a mudguard of the parked truck, spun into the road again and catapulted on. I pulled myself out of Richard's lap and braced my hands frantically against the almost opaque wind-shield, while from the back of the truck rang Herbert's hog-calling song and the thumps of his fists as he beat violent time upon the cases of T.N.T.

"Here we are!" bawled Richard, making an adroit S-skid which brought us broadside to the first avalanche of earth that was blocking the road. I leaned out, limply. Four men, three women, and six children, like blue-clad ghosts, were seated despondently upon that mountain of rubble, twiddling the little scoops in their hands, their heads drooping as if unable to support the yard-wide straw hats they wore, their backs bent beneath the sodden rain-capes of straw. The faces of the children were crusted with scabs. They alone worked, at long intervals, dragging their bamboo scoops between them, removing a few ounces of earth, then returning to sit by the zombies who were their parents. One of the men slowly took off his hat and examined a fistful of rice wrapped in leaves in the crown of it. He ate it slowly. The others watched.

"This is hopeless," said Richard, jolting the truck around to face camp again. "We may be stuck here for weeks. Since you're not taking film here anyway—and God knows

there's nothing to take—I'd advise you to try to get back to Burma before the rains have washed out the road at that end too. All you wanted was to learn the condition of the road during the monsoon. You should be satisfied."

Armand agreed that we should be satisfied. We packed that night and crawled into sopping beds with the intention of rising before the sun.

Quentin and Jack in the tent next to us talked drowsily. Quentin was explaining China's New Life Movement. Jack grunted. China, said Quentin, had been a land of old men until now, of passive old men worshipping their passive ancestors, until the current war with Japan. Now the youth of China was taking over, and it was their intention, he asserted, that the war should continue for at least ten years longer, no matter what the cost in ceded territories. Jack's reply was half grunt, half snore. For only thus, said Quentin sleepily, could China be unified. The provinces were so far separated, geographically and culturally, that the peasants of Shansi in the north, for example, had never realized that those of Yunnan, where we were camping now, were their racial brothers. The war was waking them gradually to their common danger, and there would be a unified China in time, if they could protract the war. . . .

"Huh?" Jack mumbled, rousing.

Quentin's voice tapered into silence. Roy turned on his cot beside mine. "Hmmm, quite . . ." he said. The expedition went to sleep.

I spun awake through a dream to realize that the camp was a yowling bedlam. Something lunged against the tent and bent the supporting rod across my feet. Armand was shouting through the yowls, "Dave! Roy! Jack!" The gentle Roy, the ant-feeder and baiter of lions, was already on his feet, and beyond him through the mosquito net flap I could see the silhouette of a man, legs wide apart, a gleaming *dab* swinging murderously in the rain-speckled beam of someone's flashlight.

Two other black figures went hurtling past, Kachin bandits, all right, and not afraid of ghosts either. There was no sound from the truck where our Black Guard cowered.

I reached for my .38 and dropped it again. I might kill somebody. I slipped on the faithful brass knuckles that had seen me through a variety of troubles in the South Seas, but Roy pulled me back. He was calmly lighting one of the long magnesium flares we used for night photography. He began to wail as he zipped open the mosquito net. Then he bounded through it, howling like a banshee, and waving a blaze of light rushed straight for the three bedraggled bandits. We all yelled and converged behind him. There was no hesitation on the bandits' part. They tumbled over each other towards the flooded rice-fields. They went knee-deep into the ooze, lurching for a foothold. Leila flung a tin of baked beans after them and Roy flung the torch. We stood in the muck and laughed. The last laugh in China was ours.



Princess of Nepal

14

TIBET IS NOT "forbidden." To-day there are few forbidden lands with the exception of those, like Bukhara, under strict military control. Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, is closed to foreigners, but we might have crossed Tibetan borders with the minimum of wire-pulling, and we could have entered some distance from China without permits at all, for that eastern border is very vaguely defined. Unfortunately for us, in many ways, we were such an honourable expedition that we could not capitalize the myth of "forbidden" Tibet. We were mistaken, perhaps. Perhaps what the public wanted was the preservation of the myth, the illusion that there still existed secret lands which only intrepid explorers—such as the Denis-

Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition—could enter, with fantastic risks, to film and share with those who must stay at home.

But we were honourable, to our own loss, surely. We had scarcely left China with our cameras still unused when we encountered three English officers who had filmed the Burma Road despite the orders of the Chinese government and the Black Guard sent along with them. We drove south, rankling, passing with averted eyes the two tracts of jungle, known as the Triangle and Wa Land, where head hunters still collected souvenirs and exploration was stringently regulated by the Burmese administration. And we could no longer be surprised when we encountered two ethnologists who had taken splendid photographs in these tracts, without any authorization whatsoever.

We were a grim group when we reached Rangoon. We said good-bye to Quentin and shipped him home. The weather was still against us. Burma was in the grip of the monsoon, which prevented further work. Assam, the wettest country in the world, the home of the wild Naga tribe, was deluged with record floods. Central India, almost wholly unknown, where the descendants of the ancient Dravidians—Gonds and Bhils—still flourish evilly, was a sopping morass.

The only other countries accessible in this season, and of photographic interest, were Tibet and Nepal.

"Tibet has been overdone," said Armand, "and you might as well forget Nepal. That place really is forbidden. In all history there have not been two hundred white men allowed into the country. The British went in a short way with troops once, I believe, but Nepal has remained independent, and the few foreigners who have been there have been invited personally by the Maharajah, after months of diplomatic discussion. I know; I'd love to go too. It's the true Shangri-la, I understand, but it's out for us. Finish your drink. We're starting for Tibet in the morning."

That was that. Tibet. We could enter Tibet, via Kashmir,

climb through snow to Leh and Laddakh, enter the so-called forbidden land and bring back the first honest full-length film on the country. No heroics. It would be a hard journey, but we should not exaggerate it. Our audience, we thought honourably, deserved the truth.

But as we flew over the Bay of Bengal to Calcutta, retracing the air route which had brought us out, I looked at the clouds massed like snow to the north and thought of the Himalayas which bordered Nepal. That great cone of white might be Mount Everest, I thought wistfully, and there would be Kinchinjunga, twenty-eight thousand feet high, and Dayabung. Beneath them, between India and Tibet, was the first and last of the truly forbidden lands : Nepal. I had not thought much about Heaven as a child, for in some manner I had obtained Father Giuseppe's *Asiatic Researches*, written a century and a half ago, and there learned of a fabulous country, a little closer than Heaven, on the roof of the world : Nepal. If I might some day go to Nepal, I said to my shocked parents, the devil could then have me for keeps.

Armand seemed to be talking to himself rather than to Leila and me.

"It's probably very much like India. It's probably over-rated because it's so little known. My guess is . . ."

"Tibet?"

"Nepal."

There it was again. The ghost of the expedition : Nepal.

Our plane tobogganed smoothly, sliding through rain so thick it looked like icicles, into Dumdum airport, a few miles from Calcutta. Jack was waiting for us with the three cars which had come by boat. We drove through jumbled streets to the Great Eastern Hotel, and went up in the elevator with a sacred bull.

As all bulls in India are sacred, you are as likely as not to meet one sitting on your doorstep or blocking the road in front of your car. And you will either go around him, carefully, or

wait for him to move, knowing that if you should hurt a hair of the arrogant creature's tail the swarming crowds would tear you limb from limb. And defile your remains unspeakably. No one owns these animals. They are bought and turned loose on the streets by some Indian with a sin to expiate. They fatten and flourish at the expense of the devout, and make a havoc of the traffic which is snarled enough in Calcutta at the best of times.

The bull which roamed our hotel, and which none dared evict, must have been a joy and a vengeance for the Indians who were forbidden to enter the better British Clubs. The Great Eastern had for years been his home, the elevator his sanctum. As Nepal haunted my dreaming days, so that smug bull made my nights horrible with plans of how I might viciously dispose of it. And half the sleepers in the hotel must soon have developed the same complex as I, a complex which only a little while later nearly meant death for both Roy and me.

It rained on our first day in Calcutta, and we planned to leave for Tibet, via Kashmir, before the end of the week. But six days later it was pouring and we learned that several villages in Bengal were completely inundated. When ten days had passed and the roads were so thick with flood refugees, with their carts and baggage, that it was impossible for us to drive even over the Hoogli Bridge, we—and our sacred bull—gave up all thought of going outdoors. We endured our confinement only by giving parties at the hotel for both Europeans and Indians who were brave enough to come. We gave stupendous parties in the air-cooled dining-room which had the only tolerable climate in Calcutta, and to them came not only the "pukka sahibs" at the top of colonial society, but whatever conjurer or nautch girl or yogi or priest might in any way be entertaining.

On the seventeenth day, when an all-time record for continuous rain had been established, Armand, with a face as

grim as the weather, was serving cocktails as graciously as could be expected of a leader whose expedition seemed likely to be mired forever in this abominable luxury. Our morale was very low. Here we were, explorers, exploring among the cocktail snacks. I looked at Leila, imperturbable and charming as always, but forcing her laughter now; at Roy, slumped over his lemonade; at Jack, clutching his whisky as if he would strangle the glass. I passed a mirror quickly.

Armand was talking to a dark bloom of a native girl whom we all had noticed. "So," he was saying, "we'll start for Tibet the first moment the weather clears."

She pulled her sari tighter at the throat. "But why Tibet, Mr. Denis? Everyone has been there. Wouldn't you rather see Nepal?"

"Nepal! Heavens, yes, but that's impossible, you know. We foreigners are simply not permitted in there. The Maharajah is very reasonably worried that the English will filter in just as they did in India, until . . ."

"Perhaps it could be arranged anyway," said that golden bloom of a girl. "You see, my father is the Maharajah . . ."

Only the guests at that memorable cocktail party can believe that the rains ceased just then. It was a miracle, wrought by the miracle of Nepal being suddenly opened to us. We could hear the traffic in the streets again with the cessation of the thundering rain. We heard the cries of the *gharri* drivers, the glad shouts of the ragged children who sold sweets and fruit. And the sun still shone in the morning when the Princess Saya Mala sent a telegram to her august parent in Nepal, to be taken by runner from Raxaul on the Indian frontier across the Himalayan foothills to the mysterious capital, the city of our dreams, Khatmandu.

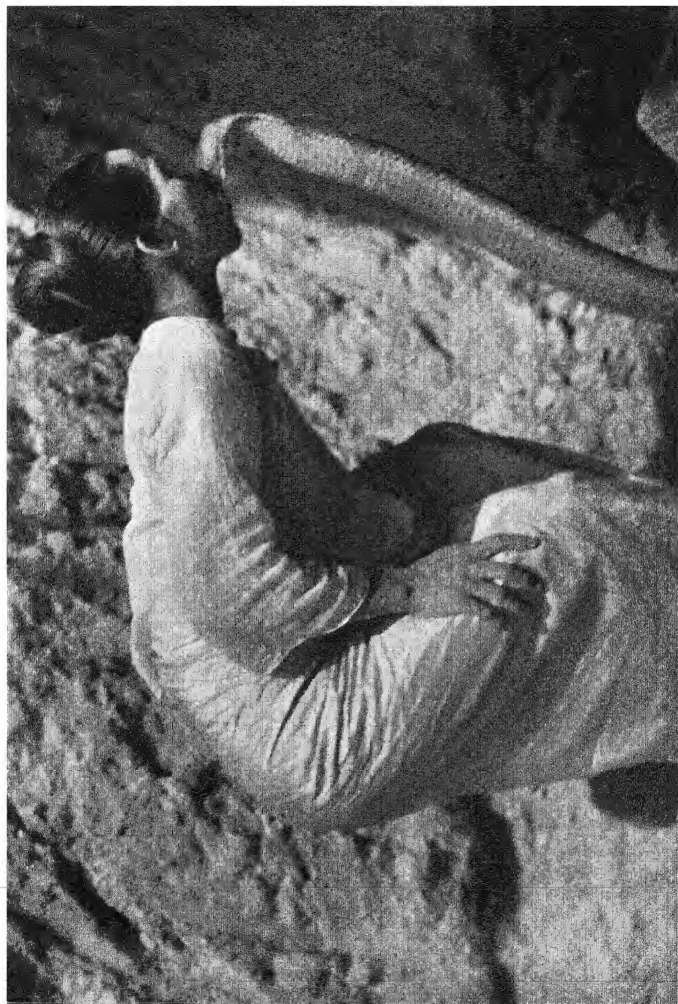


15 We Breach the Forbidden Land

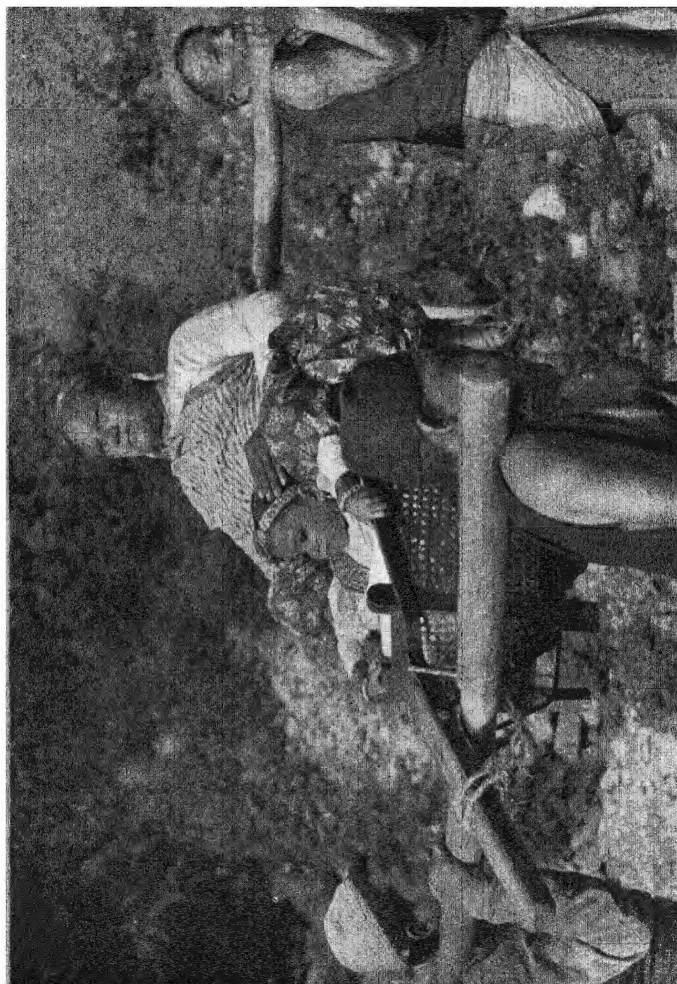
THE ANSWER TO the telegram would of course be "No." Such whopping ambitions as ours are not achieved casually, by a chance meeting, even by a Princess in the rain. None of the old residents of Calcutta had ever been to Nepal, and the library showed me, in the half dozen books written by men who had actually been invited there, that the negotiations required in every case at least a year. I had no doubt that the daughter's request would weigh heavily with the Maharajah, but she, I had heard, was one of some astronomical number of progeny and might indeed be no longer a favourite, if he remembered her at all.

She came to tea with her husband, a Prince of neighbouring Assam. Chowdree was without question the most remarkable man of any Eastern race I had ever known, a political and financial and mechanical genius who owned a chunk of Assam that was plainly visible on the smallest map. Though he was still in his twenties he had amassed a fortune by intelligent economy and had become politically famous as the legislator of an ideal province. But he had talents in addition to these, and unlike most Indians his great wealth in no way prevented the employment of them. He was an architect, untrained, of amazing ability; he was an heroic hunter among the beasts that infest Assam; he was an industrial designer of such parts that he built, almost unaided, the monoplane in which he travelled from Calcutta to his jungle home.

As Saya Mala represented the finest and most exotic type of Indian, or Nepalese, womanhood, so did Chowdree physically portray the debutante's dream of an Oriental prince. He was not tall, but he had the figure of a man accustomed to the precipitous jungled mountains of Assam, and as his shoulder



II-SA-PU KISSES HER GOD



MOUNTAIN DANDY OR TRAVELLING-CHAIR

brushed yours when his Rolls-Royce rounded a bend, you felt a knot of muscles like coiled cobras beneath the Bond Street coat. I took a great delight in watching the wilting of the haughty British blondes beneath his sultry and most knowledgeable eyes; he was better than many of them, wealthier, wiser, with a culture more ancient, as gentle as they in blood, and physically a god in contrast to the liverish men in topi and spinal pad who married them.

Pete Bradford, who was not of these, but such a man as could beat the Indians from Rangoon to Karachi at their own game of polo, took Armand, Leila, and me to visit Chowdree in his town house. Peter slapped the Rani, Chowdree's sister, upon the back and called her "Rani" for short. He led us like a child from one bit of marble to another in that museum of a home, retailing the story of each, for this man's great Indian knowledge and Indian sympathy could permit as much pride in Chowdree's achievement as he had little in his own.

It was an aerial palace, of square and circular rooms spaced by courts where peacocks and great-billed birds roamed without restriction. There were fountains outside and in, and one of which Pete and Chowdree were equally proud, for it had in its centre a sleek model of Chowdree's own plane, constructed by himself and ingeniously motored by the current of water which not only revolved the propeller but alternately lifted the plane, as if upon a sudden wind current, and pointed its nose from side to side of the enormous chamber.

We walked down a corridor glowing green through illuminated glass bricks, past a nude female statue thirty feet high, up a flight of winding stairs treaded with some black stone and into a room the size of a banquet hall, pure white, dazzling, walled and floored with marble and ceiled with a pale wood that caught and refracted light like mother-of-pearl. Tall Sikh servants in scarlet coats and intricately wound turbans stood at regular intervals around the hall, each with a tabouret holding a special drink—Scotch, cocktails, liqueurs, lemonade.

They were gigantic, piratical men, and though their office was hospitality their arrogant health made me feel somehow depraved when I meekly said, yes, thank you, I should indeed like a *chota peg*, a very small Scotch.

One end of the hall led to a globular chamber with a high, domed ceiling frescoed with luscious nudes. In the centre was a small, circular swimming pool filled with illuminated purple water and surrounded by low divans which were covered with the soft skins of snow leopards. A pet crane minced to the water's edge, slashed down his bill and caught a goldfish. I saw that the bottom of the pool was mirrored.

"It's amusing to swim in it," said Peter over my shoulder. "The fish nibble at you and it tickles."

The movies, I thought, had still a lot to learn about Oriental settings for romance.

The Rani and the golden Princess smiled quizzically at us when we returned to the marble hall. My glass was replenished so neatly I scarcely knew it had left my hand. We moved towards the welcome breeze wafted across the balcony which ran the entire length of that immense room. The tops of the trees moved gently beneath us, and beyond we could see the Hoogli River, jewelled by the lights of the embankment.

Down the balcony came the Prince of Assam, flowing as smoothly and powerfully towards us as the river itself. Suddenly there was a screech in the treetops. A branch bent down to the rail and from it leaped a small, black, woolly ape, a gibbon, one of the most intelligent of the anthropoids. Holding both long arms in the air for balance, as only gibbons do, he ran towards his master and jumped into his arms. It was only then that we saw the envelope he held in one fist.

Saya Mala laughed at our bewilderment. "He's the mail-man," she said. "He waits all day and night in the trees by the gate to get the mail. And when we read it, if it's good news, he goes wild with delight; if it's a bill he tries to snatch it away and tear it up. No one taught him. My husband

had to shoot his mother for food when he was on *shikar* in Assam, and we have loved him like an adopted child. Now watch him."

Armand and Leila were visibly suffering with envy, for at their amazing home in Connecticut, half farm, half zoo, they had once had a gibbon, and the quest of another to replace their beloved Playboy was, I always thought, one of the secret purposes of this expedition.

Chowdree, speaking through the gibbon which had encircled his chest and neck, said, "A telegram. It's for you, Saya."

The Princess took it from him, and the ape's black wistful face turned to watch her eagerly.

"It is from Nepal," she said.

"Nepal? Already?" We forgot the wondrous gibbon and stood breathless while she took an interminable time to examine the envelope, then carefully and neatly pull open the flap, as if she were intent upon saving the glue.

She smiled and considered the message. She nodded thoughtfully.

"You may go," she said at last. "My father the Maharajah cordially invites the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition to his country, and will permit it to make certain moving pictures there. The first professional films," she added, "that will ever have been made."

The ice was shaking against my glass. My head ached. I looked at Armand and thought ludicrously what a bump he would make if the six feet four of him should keel over in a faint.

A shriek burst from the gibbon who had been watching the Princess's face. He dived to the floor, head first, and jumped immediately into the air in a manner that would have turned Nijinsky green. Again and again he jumped and chattered with joy, for he knew that he had brought good news.

We gulped our drinks and excused ourselves as soon as possible.

Mr. White the American Consul, was at the hotel desk with Roy when we came in and remarked with such restraint as we could manage that we had been permitted, indeed invited, to go to Nepal. Three cablegrams from America were slid along the desk to Armand, but he ignored them.

Mr. White held his head with both hands.

"For thirty years," he groaned, "I've been spending my vacations tramping around Tibet, and for thirty years my greatest ambition has been to get into Nepal. Now you people manage it in little more than a week!"

The sacred bull perambulated through the lobby, eyeing us amusedly. Roy blew it a kiss.

During the frantic preparations of the next three days we would occasionally drop into the Bengal Club for succour and John Collinses. It was on one of these stifling afternoons that the talk seemed to rest and remain on the reasonable subject of cold drinks. Someone mentioned the Goldwasser of Germany, that clear, sweet fluid that has flecks of real gold leaf floating in it. "A regal drink," said Leila.

"By cripes," said Jack, "think how your insides would look. Like a tunnel of gold if you could drink enough of it." His Collins I noticed was already gone.

"Drinks be damned!" said Armand suddenly. "What the devil are we going to bring as a gift to the Maharajah? We've got to do it, you know."

Leila's phrase, "A regal drink," still hung in my humid mind. "I have it," I said, "Goldwasser! That is, if we can buy it here. And if we can't we can make it. Why not? I've made quite passable vodka from a recipe given me by a Russian in New York. Look, we make the vodka, a couple of gallons of it, flavour it slightly, then buy our own gold leaf and sliver it into the drink. Leila can print handsome labels for the bottles, which of course should be of some unusual shape. We'll stopper them with gold sealing wax. You're right, it's a regal present: beautiful, dignified, useful, original . . ."

Armand stemmed this flow of adjectives. "You children can make and present your homebrew as coming from yourselves, if you wish, but not from me; I've tried Dave's cooking. Let us now consider seriously a gift from me to the Maharajah, something regal, beautiful, dignified, useful, original . . ."



The Master of Gold 16

BUT LEILA BELIEVED in the notion, and together we set out for the liquor stores, only to find that Goldwasser was unobtainable. We would have to make it ourselves. It was a relief to learn from the Princess over the telephone, by discreet inquiry regarding pharmaceutical supplies in Nepal, that, yes, indeed, we could there obtain pure alcohol. In that case there was no need to carry the liquor itself over the Himalayas.

We next sought the gold leaf, from one jeweller's shop to another all over Calcutta, up and down Chowringhee Road, through the jammed lanes by the burning ghats, even in Kariah Road where the daintily beautiful courtesans of India and Japan leaned like massed flowers, russet and pale yellow flowers, from rival balconies. Old jewellers bowed us hospitably into their narrow shops, made room for us upon padded floors and produced all manner of marvels in silver and gold: belled bracelets, triple finger rings joined by a slender chain, pendants to wear in the nose, anklets weighing several pounds. But gold leaf they seemed not to understand, or not to use.

We drove the expedition car into streets that were even more tortuous and foul, urging it cautiously among the crowds of turbanned and sari-ed poor folk who swarmed to read the legend DENIS-ROOSEVELT ASIATIC EXPEDITION written in black letters across the battleship-grey doors, to wonder at the camera platform upon the roof and gape through the windows at the

pile of white boxes, striped in various colours to distinguish them. Leila or I would remain at the wheel while the other of us darted into the shops to seek our very important tenth of an ounce of gold leaf. We met encouragement at last from one syphilitic artisan who suggested that we try, of all places, a pharmacy. He pointed across the street to the most evil-looking hole that ever catered to the ills of man. We locked the car, sat a boy on the roof as guard with the willow switch we carried for such occasions, and approached what had been called the pharmacy.

It was not at all an unusual Indian pharmacy. We had seen its like on every street in the poorer sections, but I had never imagined that even for a Maharajah I should be induced to enter one. You could smell it from the car, the stink of death. I was far less eager now to see all of life, to live in the depths, to suffer in the cause of literature, than I had been in my twenties, ten years ago. Now at thirty-three, since it had become my job to travel in strange parts, I was quite content to travel as comfortably as circumstances would permit. I had once volunteered in operating rooms; I had slept at La Grappe d'Or, the most degenerate den of underworld Paris; I had, in my youthful quest for copy during those days of "living vividly," once helped exhume a leper on one of the South Sea Isles; but this weird pharmacy quite lacked appeal to me now.

There were no windows. The spaces where they might have been to restrain the stench were hung with the dried or cooked carcasses of animals, birds, insects, snakes, withered or bloated but all very dead. Boiled iguanas hung by their tails; the skulls of men and beasts were impaled on spikes jutting from a cluttered wall; stiff skins, haired and hairless, were tacked to the ceiling. One corner with a wire net around it was filled with aphrodisiacal litter: a couple of rhinoceros horns, half a dozen antlers of Mongolian deer, the manure of owls, the red and white rock salt from Kalabagh, the black salt,

of special virtue, from Kohat. There were noisome piles of beetles similar to the familiar Spanish Fly, or *Cantharis*, and other piles that seemed to be composed of the pale headless corpses of dwarfs, their long legs agonizedly twisted; these would be mandrake root, the sovereign aphrodisiac of peasant belief.

I was to see Leila face charging elephants with greater nonchalance than she showed here, and when, as I entered I was slapped on the throat by a dead snake not yet dry that had rotted from its hook and fallen at that very moment, I started so violently that I knocked over a heap of the filthy bottles in which the drugs would evidently be sold.

This was an unpropitious entrance—as I could judge by the glare of the old wizard who was grinding some hell-bane in a mortar at the back of the dark shop.

“Look,” said Leila, “that’s gold leaf!”

It was, undoubtedly, a pile of gold leaf glowing like a flame in the darkness, and beside it were ranged a row of little gold-leaf-covered pills. I bent down to see that the wizard was mashing together the skeleton of some rodent with the brittle skin of a frog. To this he added a yellow ointment, mixed the mess thoroughly and put dabs of it on small squares of gold leaf which he folded over into parcels like Italian ravioli or the Chinese *wonton*.

He looked up at me. “Now what would *you* like?” he asked in perfect English.

For the second time I nearly stumbled with surprise. “Why, er, a little gold leaf, just a little, about three sheets.”

“What do you mean, ‘about’?” he demanded. “Do you mean two and a half or three and a half, or what?”

Leila edged around a suspended iguana. “If you don’t mind my asking, aren’t you English?”

The old man stared at her a long time, his lip curling. Leila is very pleasant to look at, when there is not an iguana like a sword of Damocles hanging over her head.

"Perhaps I was," he said at last, "which is more than you can say. Either of you."

We were both too startled to be bothered by this. "Three sheets," I said.

"Gold leaf?" he asked. "Or in the wind? Ha-ha-ha." His crazy laughter grated like the bones of his awful beasts.

"Rather a wit, aren't you?" I remarked as my annoyance grew.

"*Rahther!*" he replied with the inflexion of Oxford. "May I inquire what you want gold leaf for?"

"If I may ask why the deuce you wrap pills in it."

He appraised me carefully with his little eyes. I stared back as boldly as possible. There was no question about it; the man was white, an Englishman, but how he had come to this estate I couldn't even guess. He nodded finally.

"Gold leaf," he said, giving a great swirl to his pestle among the powdered skin and bones, "is of different sorts. There is the alloy of gold and silver, the alloy of copper and gold, the alloy of copper and gold and silver in varying proportions. This adulteration with lesser metals does reduce the malleability of the gold but without it the gold sticks to the skin in which it is beaten and fractures when it is removed. . . . Fascinated, aren't you?"

"Fascinated," I said.

"Alloys may vary, for different grades of leaf, from 20 grains of copper for 456 grains of gold, to equal proportions of silver and gold. You follow? A fine quality leaf, such as I myself prepare, is made by using an alloy of silver and copper in the proportion of twelve grains each to one ounce of gold, 998 fine, and beating it to a thinness of one two-hundred-thousandth of an inch. This is most easily assimilable by the human digestive system. The sacred cattle require other proportions."

"Do they?" said Leila.

The apothecary glared like a basilisk.

"Pliny mentions the medicinal values of gold, though not in

leaf, and among other prescriptions gives one for sore eyes : blind a lizard with a copper needle and keep it alive in a glass vase—so that you may observe it—that is bound with gold, then when the lizard's eyes film over remove the gold rings and apply them to the eyes of the patient. He will soon be healed. Constantinus Africanus states that if a child, before it has been weaned, is given to swallow the brains of a goat drawn through a golden ring it will never have epilepsy. Arnold of Villanova mentions the great virtue of wine in which a heated golden plate has been plunged four or five times ; indeed he writes that if you merely hold a gold-piece in your mouth while drinking, your gastric maladies will be cured, though he recommends that the gold be reduced to potable form."

"Now we're getting there," said Leila.

The strange old Englishman spat adroitly between her feet. "Roger Bacon," he resumed, with a sneer which implied we might never have heard of him, "was a firm advocate of the golden elixir, holding that there was no ill known to man which it would not benefit, and Sir Unton, ambassador from Queen Elizabeth to the court of Henry IV, was once treated with the *Confectio Alcarmis*, compounded of various things, plus gold. King Henry himself, the Grand Monarch, was infected by his own drinking water with typhoid fever ; the choicest physicians of the day gave him pearls dissolved in vinegar, and gold leaf suspended in wine. Even to-day in England it is admitted that the application of gold to certain skin diseases is beneficial. Gold theosulphate is a specific for lupus."

Leila and I were more than ever impressed. This crass old cock seemed to know what he was talking about. But how was it possible that he should have descended to such a den as this ?

"Still fascinated ?" he asked. "Trousseau and Pidoux, who made the most exhaustive study of therapeutic gold, maintained that it was of unquestionable value for syphilis when used in the form of powder by mouth or as a pomade

applied to sores. Scrofula, leprosy, elephantiasis, ascites, all yield to it. Juvenile diarrhoea may be effectively treated by .33 to .77 grammes of powdered gold in honey, given daily. Amenorrhoea is helped by it, and it will induce abortion. Récamier recommends a vaginal douche composed of 5 parts gold perchloride in 3 to 12 thousand parts of water. The famous Calmette of the Pasteur Institute at Saigon discovered that gold was extremely beneficial when mixed with his anti-snake-bite serum and injected hypodermically."

I wiped the sweat from my throat. The hot wind of India, laden with sacred dung dust, seemed to enter every pore, and stay there.

"Now," said the apothecary, as he added three wings of a beetle to the mess in the mortar, "forty per cent of the world's total gold production is annually absorbed by India—a fact of statistical accuracy—and it is interesting to speculate upon the proportion of this that is absorbed directly by the Indian digestive system. Every pharmacist sells it here. The poorest peasant buys his medicine wrapped in cigarette paper, but if he can by any means, by robbery or debt, bring himself to afford it, he will buy for a few annas extra that minute gold envelope which doubles the efficacy of the drug. I assure you that enough gold is sold, for medicinal purposes alone, to make a millionaire of me when once I have acquired the full monopoly of it—which, my bright, young, go-getting American friends, I am rapidly doing."

Leila looked at me with a look which said that of the three of us it was we who were mad.

The old man smiled suddenly. The truculence dropped from him like the shed skin of a snake, but he still looked reptilian, greasy with sweat, his long eye-teeth protruding like fangs.

"Now what for God's sake do you want to do with gold leaf?"

I was beginning to feel silly about this. After that long

exposition of the humane uses of gold, it seemed not quite decent to foist gold leaf upon an unknown Maharajah, in, of all things, a drink. Leila looked disdainful of my temporizing when I replied that I wished to make Goldwasser of it, that I liked it very much indeed.

The pharmacist peeled off three small sheets of gold from a thick packet of it.

"Three rupees," he said. He drew his finger across his forehead where the sweat had made mud upon his eyebrows, being careful not to disturb the trident of Vishnu that was painted between. The finger had ploughed to the subsoil of pink English skin.

"Speaking of drink," he said, with as evil a leer as I have ever seen on a man, "let's have a drink."

We were too thirsty to resist, no matter what the brew might be. I had inhaled already too much powdered snake skin and owl manure and bone dust to object even to a decoction of these, provided it be wet.

"Fine," said Leila and I both, through the grit on our lips.

"Krishna!" the old man called. Smoothly and quickly as the tongue of a lizard a nearly naked boy slipped from the shadow and sat down to guard the door.

"Come." We followed through a passage that was littered with junk, most of which had once been alive. A cobweb like a sticky elastic band caught me under the nose. Leila stumbled. The stench was nauseous. Then, abruptly, we turned a corner and stopped in sunlight before a scene that literally staggered me.

"Please make yourselves at home." The old man was standing between us, very tall now, looking with pride at the lovely walled garden we had entered. Java fig trees and the stately peepul shadowed the benches by the wall. Orchids grew from wicker baskets. A small fountain played at one side of the garden, sending a jet of blue and silver before a

shrine where Vishnu, his four arms extended, sat uncomfortably on his merman's tail.

The spot was idyllic, a cloister of dreams impossible to imagine as the home of the grizzly wizard who owned the shop beyond the passage. I exclaimed with delight at the beauty I saw before me, and when Leila, wordless, touched my arm, and indicated by a lift of her chin a golden statue on the other side of the court, I am afraid that, like a schoolboy—an un-English one—I spluttered, "That's the loveliest thing I have ever seen."

"It's my wife," said the wizard. "Literally my wife." I had a qualm at that.

Chota pegs were served to us in glasses that were not of glass, I assumed from their texture, but of crystal, and while we stood sipping from them I wondered at the voice, speaking Hindu, which seemed to issue from the well at the foot of the golden statue.

"That's Tita-Bhai, the raven in the well," said the old man. I looked down and saw a great black bird perched upon a stick that had been wedged between the stones. "Perhaps she merely likes the coolness there, but I rather think she still loves her golden mistress, for whom she is named. Her tongue is split, of course, and she talks quite well."

I examined the statue. It was of an Indian girl seated with her legs curled beneath her. She was quite nude, and every detail of her body was superbly modelled. I could not detect a single seam left by the casting.

"Exquisite, isn't she?" the old man asked as we returned to a table under a lavender jaquaranda tree. The enchantment of the garden had made me forget his talk of gold and the preposterous statement that he was rapidly acquiring a monopoly of it. I asked him what he had meant.

"The gold leaf? Ah. You'll have to hear something of a story then. If your forbearance is as great as my pride is small, I'll tell it to you. I'm surprised you haven't heard it somewhere already, for it was the scandal of Calcutta once."

He dug a grimy forefinger under his turban and deftly extracted a louse. I took a quick look at the garden, to see if it still was there. This was beyond me entirely.



“If Kali Will Be For- 17 bearing . . .”

“I CAME OUT here in 1901, a boy of twenty-three, just graduated from Oxford with a degree in chemistry. I had no interest in making a success in the world. I only wanted adventure and enough money to pay for it, when it required payment, as when I wanted to hunt tiger or serow in Burma, or to properly entertain the Maharajah of —, so that in turn he might invite me to a cheetah-hunt. You know, they run down antelope with cheetahs here, the fastest animal there is.

“A generous inheritance lasted me for quite a time, and I added to it considerably by my work in the Government Assay Office, chiefly assaying gold. But I never could manage to live within my income; maharajahs are an expensive hobby, you know, and I played around with more of them than was healthy for a boy with my imagination and curiosity. I lost money on the races. I drank too much. And because I was healthy and imaginative and deficient in what you nice people call a moral sense, because, perhaps, I was red-headed physically and emotionally, I spent more money than you’d believe possible on the little Hindu girls. Not the courtesans, the exclusive and expensive *hetææ* you find at the races, decked out with authentic diamonds, but the low-caste *dassis*, the lovely poisonous little girls of the *randi-bazaar*.”

The lewd old lips quivered. I glanced at Leila. Nothing

could disturb the poise that had supported her through the wonders and horrors of half the world.

"They would be cheap, you'd say? At five rupees a visit? Ah, they would indeed if you were the sort of brute who usually frequents them. I wasn't. There was a perverseness in me that made me love to exalt the little devils, who all their lives, from very babyhood, had been exploited. The attitude I like to think I held towards them was one of tenderness and pity, a desire to right their wrongs, but I'm not so sure of it. You will have a drink, or a *buqa*?"

"A *chota peg*, thanks. No *buqa*."

The boy filled our glasses and placed the great water-pipe at his master's side. Except for that cleaner line of white above his eyebrows it was hard to believe he was not a Hindu, squatting and sucking at his *buqa*, blowing the perfumed smoke through his nose. The bird, Tita-Bhai, shrilled a message from the well again, and Tita-Bhai, the statue of the exquisite girl, for a moment was lighted by a shaft of sun as a bough of the peepul tree was carried to one side by a sultry breeze.

"But whatever the attitude, I simply could not have these youngsters for a night or a languid afternoon, then return them to their huts. Whenever one was especially kind to me, and seemed to understand not merely my need of her comfort but my need of the romance which she as a woman represented and I as a transient adventurer could only buy, I set her up decently in a decent quarter of the city and paid her rent so long as she remained a decent girl. But it never lasted for very long. There's no loyalty in them. Each time I would think that this Magdalen I had saved would love me as very shortly I came to love her—for I could fall in love to order then, and needed to—but each time I would find that the *chaprassi* at my gate, or the boy, or some snide young subaltern I had been having drinks with, had cuckolded me under my very nose.

"This virtually drove me to drink, or so I believed, in fear of my incompetence to hold even a girl of the bazaars. It was

silly reasoning, but it served as an alibi on those mornings-after when I was too sick to go to work or on those nights when I behaved like a drunken boor in the homes of good people. One by one I lost the girls I had tried to exalt and to love. I lost my inheritance at the races. I lost my friends, and their respect. Eventually I lost my job.

“I remember one incident of humiliation which makes me writhe even now. While hunting in Bhutan I had captured a young cheetah and tamed it quite easily. When I visited my great friend the Maharajah, which I did quite often, we used to take it hunting with us. With his own dozen cheetahs mine would lope along beside the car until we saw the antelope, then the pack of them would be off, shooting like black and tawny rockets across the plains, but mine was always the first to bring down the game. The Maharajah, my friend, would have given a fortune to have him, and if I had not been so attached to the strange cat-like and dog-like animal I should freely have left him with the Maharajah, my good friend, as a gift.

“But when I was broke and discredited even as a chemist, when the *chaprassis* of the club no longer salaamed to me as I passed the gate, wishing that I had the nerve to enter and sign a worthless chit for a drink, I sent a message to the Maharajah offering to sell the cheetah. What I received in reply, without even a note, was the skull and horns of the last gazelle my cheetah had brought down. They had never been cleaned; they stank; and there were maggots where the eyes had been.”

Leila did not look up from her glass. I said, “The b—louse!” and looked at the statue of Tita-Bhai, while the bird, Tita-Bhai, tried to pretend he was two birds at once, both arguing loudly.

“I had no job, almost no money at all, and not a white friend in India. And as I had to stay clear of the authorities for fear of deportation, I accepted at last the offer of a pimp in the *randi-bazaar*. He let me a room in his house. There I could escape

discovery and dissipate to my heart's content. But I didn't do so ; I worked, by God ! My chemical training plus my avarice brought me a new interest in life : alchemy."

"Did you succeed ?" I asked kindly. An iguana could not have turned on me more baleful eyes.

"I proved," said he with decision, "that alchemy is hopeless."

"Tcjah !" said Leila.

"I did, however, make a meagre living by compounding drugs from the native pharmacopœia, to which I added effective doses of calomel, acetanilid, sulphur, and whatever contributed to man's happiness by taking pain out of him, far better than any alchemical elixir of life could do. I experimented with the native herbs and found many of them, unknown to civilized science, which were beneficial in curious ways. I committed fraud upon the people who now have become my own by catering to their faith in magical potions, of simples made out of the junk you see in my shop out there. And I gave them gold leaf, which really does them a great deal of good, psychologically, when wrapped around a pill."

The sun was setting. The minah birds were still and so was the raven in the well. There was no sound in the garden but the bubble-bubble of the *buga*.

"Meanwhile I was regaining my health, for I drank no more and was finding life again adventuresome. From time to time one of the girls whom I had helped with my pills would of her own accord come to pass the evening with me, and though they were professionals they would never accept an anna as a gift. More and more of them came in the evening, still uninvited, and often my shop would be filled with them in the morning, when their trade was slack. I couldn't understand it ; they just liked me, they said. I learned their language easily ; I learned their fearfully beautiful faith ; I became a Hindu and worshipped with them, these soiled children who had taken me to their breasts when my own world cast me out.

"Gradually I came to believe an appalling thing, that I was a little more than a man to them, that I was like those priests of old India who were attached to the temples to deputize for God, to console the barren women and sanctify virgins, for these prostitutes adored me as they lay in my arms. But occasionally I would be puzzled by some girl out of their class who sought me and achieved no joy of it. My worshipful harlots came less and less frequently as these others came more and more, never happily, but as if by some compulsion outside themselves. The odd thing was that these were all of them superb physical examples of young Indian womanhood. But damn it, I couldn't go on like this. I began turning them away.

"Now listen, children," the old man said, and the warped mouth trembled as if it were about to make a plea which had often before been scorned, "you don't believe half of this, but I want you to. What I am about to tell you now may seem even more incredible than the rest, but it is true. I swear by Vishnu and Tita-Bhai that it is true."

Leila closed her hand over the gnarled hand that was clasping the *buga* stem.

"I began turning them away," he repeated, "for this wasn't the sort of love I sought. But they kept coming, and one night after one of them had gone I discovered this incredible thing, a small chunk of gold, chipped from a bracelet, probably, in the middle of the floor. That might have been an accident, as I thought, but when I began to find gold regularly on my floor mat, not much of it, but always a crumb or two after one of these strange, joyless, perfect women had gone, there were only two conclusions to be made, either that I was completely mad or that I was for some reason being paid in a metal I adored. I had the gold tested; it was real. I tested my mind in a hundred ways; it was sane.

"Then one night as I lay in bed smoking the *buga* and pondering on the amazing turn my life had taken, the door

opened quietly and into the path of moonlight stepped the most exquisite lass I had ever seen in this land of beautiful girls. But she was sobbing. Slowly she took off her sari to reveal a figure that must have been sculptured by the gods themselves. And still she was sobbing, almost mutely, in an anguish too great for sound.

“‘Child, what is your name?’ I asked.

“I could barely hear her answer, ‘Tita-Bhai.’ I made her sit upon the bed while I sat on the floor, holding one of her small feet in my hands.

“‘Why have you come here, Tita-Bhai?’

“She did not hesitate to answer me, except to swallow the tears.

“‘For the baby,’ she said.

“‘For the *what*?’

“‘The baby.’ Then she went on to tell me of the atrocious plot in which I unwittingly had become involved. Somewhere in the province of Behar, she said, there lived a man who was called ‘The Nail.’ He trafficked in whatever would foul the hands of other men, drugs, women, stolen goods, but chief of his trades was that of supplying, to wealthy Hindus, white or nearly white girl babies. You understand? The traffic in white women had been a prosperous one in India until the British put it down, for dark men of most southern races prefer their mistresses blonde. But this monster with the awful name of The Nail went the trade one better and by a method not easily discernible to the official eye: he found stranded white men like me, down on their luck and in the ill graces of Government. He supplied us with the choicest damsels he could lay his paws on, and if we balked, as I had done finally, he paid us to breed white baby girls to sell to his debauched customers.”

“J . . . unh!” said I.

“I can’t believe it!” said Leila.

The old man showed his annoyance by shaking Leila’s hand

away from his. “You don’t have to, but consult the Criminal Records of India, if you are interested. You will find there that I testified against The Nail.”

“That,” I said, “is one horror which Katherine Mayo missed.”

“There was not enough of it for her purpose,” he replied. “And right now let me tell you that most of the statements in *Mother India*, despite the biased or ignorant criticism of them, you will find corroborated by any old resident of India, if you can get him away from the officials, the missionaries, and the Indians themselves. . . .

“Little Tita-Bhai stopped sobbing finally and gave me her other foot to hold, when I had convinced her I would do her no harm. Five years ago, she said, she had been sold to The Nail by her father when her mother died, and apparently he had nurtured her carefully for just this vicious job. She was light in colour, like the aristocratic women of Nepal; I was pink and white, with red hair, as I told you. The Nail was right in judging that we might have bred a most valuable daughter.

“But as I looked at Tita-Bhai and held her warm bare feet to my heart, I knew that it was she I had always been seeking. She smiled in a little while for she too knew that now we must always be together. It was a gay joke on The Nail.

“We were happy. I bought this house with the gold I had earned by my involuntary partnership with The Nail, and in the shop I prospered, though you might not imagine it, and in this hidden garden we lived like great Siva and his bride, sufficient in ourselves. The raven I had caught for Tita-Bhai used to laugh at us, and it learned to mock our words. At the end of the first year we had a child, a baby girl almost as blonde as I and as lovely as its mother, but within a month it died.

“Then one evening we were sitting on this same bench and I was trying to divert my wife from her sorrows. I

invented a game, but she played half-heartedly; we would try to flip pebbles from where we sat so that they would fall straight into the well, all the way to the water without touching the sides. I think she was just beginning to enjoy it a little when into the garden came a black Madrassi boy with a letter.

"It was from The Nail, demanding that Tita-Bhai come back, with the child he had sent her to conceive."

"I wrote back angrily that the child had died and that Tita-Bhai would stay with me. I thought that would be the end of it, but within the week Tita-Bhai saw The Nail at the market when she went to superintend the cook's purchases. And in another week she thought she saw him peering at her from the balcony of that house over there. And during the third week it was the same. She was nearly insane with fear. She must go back, she said. He would kill us both in some horrible way. I told her to wait, and when he came I should deal with him, for although I was an orthodox Hindu now, I still had the white man's confidence of superiority.

"But Tita-Bhai could scarcely eat for fear of him, and she could not sleep. She would spend half the night wandering in the garden, talking to the bird which oddly enough would not sleep either when its mistress walked alone.

"It was on such a night that I half wakened to the sound of a cry in the garden: the bird, I thought, and I went to sleep again, knowing that Tita-Bhai would come in and sleep beside me when she was so tired that the fear was numbed. But in the morning, my hand reached to an empty pillow. I went down into the garden where the bird was talking in Tita-Bhai's own voice, but she was not there. The bird was chittering at the edge of the well. I went over to it. There on the water lay Tita-Bhai."

The bubble-bubble of the *buga* was a stream of soft round sounds like a cascade of little opals poured from hand to hand. I sought something to say, but any phrase would have been futile now.

“It was the very next day that I read in *The Statesman* that the case of The Nail was coming up for trial. He had been in prison for over six months.”

After a moment the full horror of it broke upon me, and I felt sweat running down my spine that was not due to the heat. The old man’s voice was changed when he went on. The anguish had gone out of it, and a brave sort of pride had entered.

“I have shown you my Tita-Bhai” he said, with a gesture towards the shadows where the statue was softly glowing. “That is truly she . . . Hindu that I am I could not bear to have her body burned at the river ghats, her sweet skull beaten open and the remnants of her flung into the Ganges for the eels to feast upon. I am a scientist, and so I have preserved her scientifically, in a manner which I hope will bring comfort to thousands who have lost the ones they loved.”

Was he mad? I wondered. He couldn’t mean this.

“That statue,” said he slowly, “is Tita-Bhai sheathed in copper, not gold, unfortunately. You are amazed? Did you never study chemistry in your great American schools? That is Tita-Bhai electroplated with a film of metal which fits and conforms to every pore. Tita-Bhai will be forever with me.”

I thought nervously, was this possible? Could flesh be electroplated?

“Yes,” the old pharmacist went on in a voice that was very tired. It seemed he read my mind. “Yes, it is possible. You can electroplate almost anything, you know. You wouldn’t understand the details of it. The essential thing is to coat the flesh with graphite or bronze dust in an adherent ointment, then pass your current through it from the copper anode. It requires care, and devotion, but it is not hard to do.”

The combination of my respect for this old wizard, aversion to the life he had led and compassion for the lost loveliness

of Tita-Bhai, was not a comfortable one. I was relieved when he rose to dismiss us. We passed the statue and furtively I touched a shoulder. The copper was as smooth as flesh and warm as flesh with the heat retained from the afternoon sun. I shivered as though I had touched an immobile body, still living, but on the verge of death.

The old man paused before we entered the tunnel leading to his hellish shop.

"She is only of copper now, but she must have gold. It takes a lot of gold for even so small a girl as Tita-Bhai. But she shall have gold. Every year brings us closer to it. One after another of the Calcutta pharmacists is becoming convinced that it is better to accept my annual fee for the right to handle his gold leaf than to take the chance of making that much money by handling it himself. They send their clients to me, with bare pills to be wrapped in the magical gold, hundreds of them already, and there will be more, I am prospering, by gold leaf alone. If the cancer gives me time, if Kali will be forbearing, in a few years I shall have such a monopoly that Tita-Bhai may be invested with gold as she is with copper now. It is a blessed thing, the gold. . . ."



18 Indian Medley

WE WERE SO eager to reach Nepal before the gods and the Maharajah could change their minds that we raced our cars north from Calcutta, pausing only occasionally to film the strange tribes which our two Indian servants, Ram and Chand, pointed out to us along the way. There would be time enough on our return. We hurried through Chandernagore, a minute French colony surrounded by British India. We came to Gobindpur, where the Santals live, the aboriginals

of Bengal. As these people, probably of Dravidian stock, have kept almost entirely clear of Hinduism, still worshipping their animist Gods, their culture may be assumed to represent India as it was before the Aryan conquest.

We found them winnowing grain in an open field. At one side of it was a perfect mansion of a house, abandoned a few years ago by the missionaries who had failed to convert this tribe. It was completely furnished. The library was full of books and the books full of worms, a pathetic memorial to the zealots who had been worsted by those they had come to save.

Indeed they would dance for us, said the elder Santals, but a jug of rum would help their spirits. We dispatched one of them for the rum, a liquor so noisome of smell that none of us could sample it. They tossed it off from cones they had twisted of some white leaf and danced hilariously the dance of the stallion and the fillies. A dozen girls clad in ragged cloths were the fillies; a wild old man with a drum was the stallion wooing them. He pranced and leaped and whinnied and beat the devil out of his drum, while the fillies giggled coyly and with arms interlocked minced slowly around him. The brass rings on their toes sparkled in the sunlight; it was a pretty scene but too monotonous to film, though we got an excellent sequence of uproarious laughter when Leila demonstrated the toys she had brought for such occasions, two collapsible wooden horses, and I inserted over my own teeth the huge set of false ones which I had salvaged from my dentist's waste-basket. By such artifice are good films made.

We drove on along the Grand Trunk Road which crosses India. We passed groups of strange people, neither men nor women, but hermaphrodites banded together in their loneliness. They make a livelihood by blackmailing shopkeepers and are paid to dance at weddings, for it is thought that the souls of the unborn children of the union will be frightened by them with the result that the children will be born normal.

We encountered magicians at the village bazaars, but none

who could compete with ours of the West. "The rope trick? Ah, no, sahib; that is only a story," they said. One could talk sufficient English to assert that he was a master of "fits"—feats, he meant, but his best "fit" was the chewing and actual swallowing of our safety razor blades, including the prized blade with which Armand had been shaving for over a month. He bit into them like potato chips, displayed the fragments on his tongue, ground them to crumbs and swallowed them without drawing a drop of blood.

We interviewed dozens of conjurers and all their fathers who were supposedly better than they, seeking always some act of magic which would be convincing on film. The old mango trick—the growing of a shrub from a seed beneath a handkerchief—was mystifying in actuality, but on film could be easily faked. We tried by every means to photograph satisfactorily with the sound camera the ventriloquial act of one shabby boy.

We had been quite discouraged with Indian magic that afternoon, discouraged too, with the culinary prowess of Ram, our cook. We sat long over lunch in a shabby Government resthouse, toying with the canned cherries which Ram, per-versely as always, had served on a plate so flat that it required true sleight-of-hand to capture them.

"So long," said Armand, "as the plate isn't actually convex . . ."

Our bearer, Chand, looked in the door with a patient expression. "Magician," said he.

The shabby boy appeared, grinning widely. He had one trick only. He could call dancing girls from the corners of the room, he said.

"Hmmp," said we, chasing cherries.

Standing in the middle of the room he fluttered his extended arm and hand towards one of the ceiling corners. We sat quietly, attentive, consuming cherries. His hand fluttered harder as he brought it a little closer to him.

"Shhh! I hear something!" said Leila. We listened. It was true. In that high corner from which he was drawing the dancing girl there was undeniably the faint sound of bells. Little by little it grew louder. I went towards the corner; the sound was definitely coming from there. I went to the boy and held my ear close to his throat; there was no sound coming from it.

Slowly that metallic jangling increased as the boy drew the invisible dancing girl into the room. The bells were everywhere now, growing louder and louder until they became deafening. They filled the room. They surged in great waves of sound, breaking against the walls, echoing from every side around us and the quiet boy whose fluttering fingers were now close to his heart. Then he moved them gradually back towards the corner again, and the bells travelled with them, decreasing little by little until we could barely distinguish a soft fairy tinkle, then only a pulse, a wavering whisper, then nothing at all.

"That gives me the shivers," Leila said.

Armand popped a cherry into his mouth, bare-handed. "It does me too, but how can we film it? It can be too easily faked on the screen. We know it to be extraordinary ventriloquism, but we never could convince the public of that. It's as futile as tap-dancing over the radio."

We drove on towards Benares on the Grand Trunk Road. It was flat land, scenically dull but for the Indians who moved languidly over it. Biblical men carried long staves for protection from beasts and bandits. Most of the women were in *purdah*—wearing black veils to conceal their faces. Camels, enormously high, dragging tiny carts, passed us, their brakes of stone grinding horribly against the solid wooden wheels. For the sake of a photograph I dropped alms into the begging bowl of a naked ascetic. His body was white with ashes; his hair, rubbed with sacred cow manure, hung in lumpy strings

to his waist, and his mouth was a sloppy orange gash around fang-like teeth.

"They look to me like they've been put in by a taxidermist," said Jack, the hunter, professionally.

Storks and monkeys strolled and loped in the road ahead of us, and occasionally we saw an antelope grazing in the fields. The little villages, unfriendly to white men, we drove through directly. Once a crowd of bearded old men rushed from a temple at our cars, waving their arms for us to stop. Once, with our windows safely closed, we ploughed through some sort of a riot in one of the villages; a score of men were milling along its single street, belabouring each other indiscriminately with black umbrellas. And once, when we stopped in the evening at a small lamp-lit stall to drink tea, a young religious agitator burst into the midst of us and harangued the rapidly gathering crowd. It seemed that we white men who were lower than the lowest caste, more despicable than the Untouchables, had so fouled the tea cups that they never could be used again. More than that, we had polluted the whole stall; it must be torn down. The crowd muttered. The poor proprietor wept and pulled his hair. The insolence of the youth was annoying, but it was his country, not ours, and his strange religion. When the crowd grew restless and packed around us we pushed in a wedge to the cars and drove out of town.

Soon we left the Trunk Road for a short cut on an abominable track to Benares. Gypsies, known here as the Criminal Tribes, stared sullenly at us as we passed their high wooden carts and tent-shaped shacks of straw so low that they had to enter them on hands and knees. These nomads made their living by thievery and the capture of animals for the great animal market at Calcutta. Some caught birds with lime-smeared switches of bamboo which they raised gently through the branches of a tree where a bird was resting. A touch of the lime to a wing would so glue the feathers that the bird

would fall. Some were expert at snaring monkeys, and some, whom we sought in vain, could reputedly call all the jackals of a district to them.

They were a handsome people, wily and independent as their kind all over the world. When we stopped by their carts at night the girls would come rushing up to us, laughing and staring into our cars, until their Chief, usually an older man, with a seamed, brown, bearded face, cuffed them away and arrogantly demanded our business. We were interested and mystified to find in each group of gypsies one hard, stocky girl who wore a silver chain suspended across her cheek from the lobe of the ear to the nostril, and one strangely sinister boy, slim and rounded and rather effeminate, who wore over his head and shoulders a flaming red hood.

As we approached holy Benares the cattle in the road forced us to slow or stop continually, and wait for them to move their sacred bodies to one side. To brush one of them might easily have meant death for us, as we were soon to learn. More frequently too we saw funeral processions on their way to the ghats, the bodies smoking with incense as their bearers trotted with them along the narrow lanes, wailing to the quick beat of drums.

Benares was bedlam, a lush jumble of spires and squatting death houses, of Hindu temples converted into Mohammedan mosques, of minarets shaken by earthquake and settling obliquely into the river. We walked through the alleys surrounding the golden temple built by the Rajah of Lahore. Fanatic men were yelling prayers at hidden shrines. Beggar children mewed like crippled kittens. A colossal husband growled at us when we admired his tiny wife's anklets, and the great black-faced and pink-behind Hanuman monkeys snarled at us when we paused to look at the bloody head of a buffalo lying before a phallic shrine to Siva.

"There's a feeling of lunacy about to break loose," said

Roy, above the din of gongs and bells and people screaming their faith.

The pungent, fetid, spicy smell of India was thick in our nostrils as we tried to find our way out from those narrow walls. Even in the alley where only toys were sold there was an air of suppressed menace, of hatred for all men who were white. The street of the brasses led us on, then the street of silver where deft workmen incised their exquisite jewellery. I put my eye to a round hole in a wall; I looked into a temple whose floor was made entirely of silver rupees. Slipping across it was a stream of blood from a goat which had just been beheaded at the feet of the black and scarlet monster of a goddess, the great Kali.

This was no longer fun. There was not a white face anywhere. We were hopelessly lost in that dark and howling maze of high-walled streets, as I had often been lost in dreams, among rooms with no windows to the sun. And when we came to the open river, the beloved Ganges, it was no longer comforting. Miles of ghats led down in broken steps to the water. There were cubicles for meditation built into them, and quiet, nude figures sitting there. Straw parasols sprouted like tipsy mushrooms to shelter the fat priests who served the millions of pilgrims who came here annually. Men and women were solemnly immersing themselves, sanctifying their sinful flesh, muttering prayers above water and below, as we could guess by the bubbles rising. At one side lay six sheeted bodies dying with their feet in the Ganges; at the other were the burning ghats from which plumes of stinking smoke ascended. Here we could see a knee in the flames, here a hairless head, and down the river, slowly turning with the current, came a little foot.

"Satisfied?" asked Armand.

"Sated," I said. "Let's get on to Nepal."

It was my turn to drive. Roy disinfected his lungs with "Little Sir Echo" on the harmonica—he was quite good at

it now, tremolo and all—but I could not for a long time escape the memory of Benares. Beauty there had been, inestimable splendour, a richness of tradition and ritual that set the mind agasping. Colour and movement and passion ran riot in Benares, when you were in its midst, but once on the open road again, with the fields cool and green beside you and the low sun tugging at its thin scarves of wind, you saw that what had passed for beauty was sick at heart of it, that its movement was convulsive and its passion perverse.

So I was thinking when I saw Armand's car ahead suddenly swerve and nearly tip over the high soft banks of the road.

"Watch it! Cow!" Roy yelled, an awful yell as it came through the harmonica.

The cow had swung to the centre of the road. We were going too fast to stop, and if we tried to pass on the sandy shoulder of the road we would certainly tip over.

"Hold on, Roy!"

I jammed my foot on the accelerator. The car soared forward, curved with two wheels in the sand, smashed into the tail of the cow and knocked it somersaulting down the bank. There was a terrifying whirr as the wheels spun in the sand. At last they gripped, jerked us out to the road again.

"Good," said Roy. "Where's the cow?"

The cow, apparently none the worse for the collision, had picked herself up and was looking with some surprise at her sacred rump. Our right headlight was shattered and the fender crumpled, but I was thankful to be still on the road and alive.

"Step on it!" Roy shouted suddenly. I stepped on it hard when I saw men rushing towards me from the fields on both sides of the road. I had no doubt of their intentions. We had assaulted the holiest thing in India, and even though it had been to save our own lives I wouldn't have given a plugged rupee for our chances if those religious fanatics caught us.

Armand's horn blared back to us as he too accelerated. It looked as if everyone in the village ahead had crowded into the road to stop us. Armand had to slow down in order not to run over them. Roy turned the radio full on and in a moment a jangling Hindu broadcast from Delhi filled the car and the narrow village street as we swung through that threatening crowd. They parted before Armand's car, closed in before ours, parted again when the hellish racket of horn and radio reached them. Glancing quickly in the mirror I saw that Jack's truck was close behind, that it had got through. Accelerating again, we reached the open country and safety.

"Sorry," I said. "There was nothing else to do. Play me 'Little Sir Echo,' will you?"



19 The Land of the Eye

WE CAME TO Patna, at last, the last large town in India where we could leave our cars, and drove exhausted down the fourteen crowded miles of its single street. The ex-Prime Minister of Behar, with marvellously long hairs in his ears which he kept caressing, told us that the ferry was crossing the sacred river Ganges almost immediately. We wired for private cars on the night train to Raxaul. We garaged our Dodges. We whispered good-bye to India with the last of our strength, saw our sixty-five pieces of baggage hurled on the deck of the little *S.S. Sasipur* and sailed diagonally across the Ganges towards the flames of the cremation fires on the other shore. As far as we could see along both banks there were fires consuming the flesh of men, all but the navels which would be floated to paradise by the holiest river in the world.

"There's the train!" said Armand. "Good Lord, it's moving!"

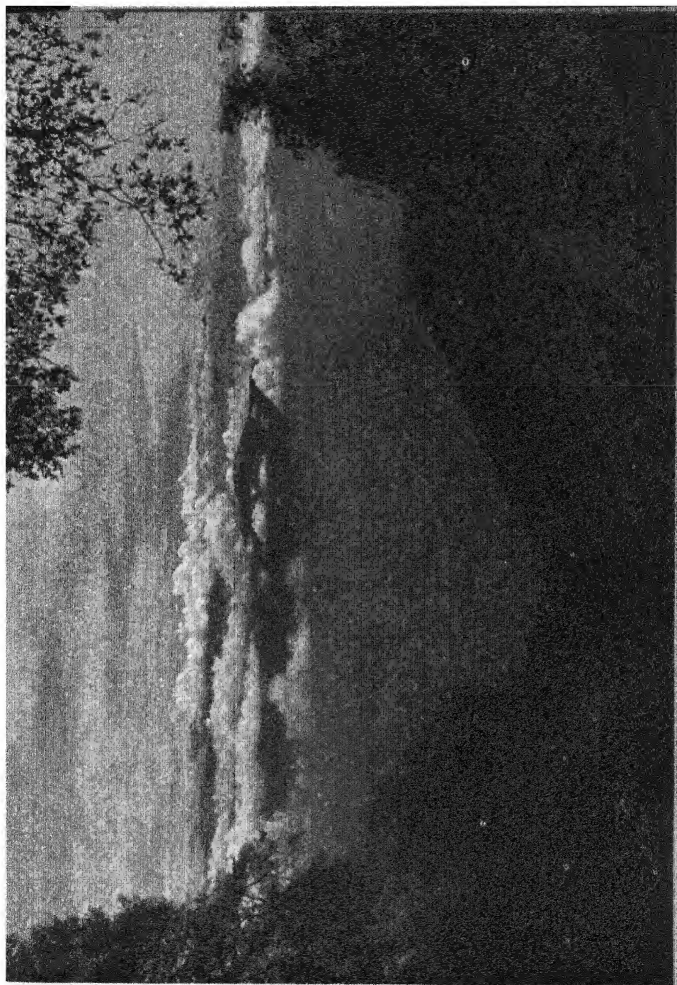
The *S.S. Sasipur* collided with the bank and we rushed ashore in the wake of Ram, our warrior cook, who drove an army of laden coolies ahead of him. The train was backing up now, then again it was moving slowly forward, sashaying back and forth as if the thing were worried that, once stopped, it might never again go journeying along its narrow tracks. I yelled to the Indian engineer to give us a chance to get aboard, but he ignored me. A body came hurtling out of one compartment as it minuetted past. The poor beggar tried to enter another and again was flung out on his head. When we finally leaped aboard and collapsed into our own two cubicles the man was making a sensational exit from a second-class carriage, straight out, a perfect swan dive into a pile of coal dust where most of him disappeared.

Jack was tugging on one of my feet when I awakened in the morning, and leaning farther out the window than I thought any man could balance. The train had stopped.

"Raxaul," he said. "And that's Nepal. And the back side of those mountains is Tibet."

Explorers should be unemotional people, accustomed to marvels, but I felt a shiver—as delightful as the beginning of a sneeze—run up my spine when I looked across the frontier and saw stretching from far east to far west the stupendous Himalayas. The horizon was rimmed with snow-capped peaks glittering pink and gold in the first light of dawn, five hundred jagged miles of them, the roofs of the world beneath which lay Nepal and Tibet.

Already the atmosphere was changing as the winds from Central Asia came roaring over those roofs, to slumber in Nepal and drift drowsily towards us. There was less perfume in the air than in India, and even though it was wafted over twenty miles of jungle and swamp it still bore the sweet clean smell of snow. Mount Everest, almost thirty thousand feet



THE VALLEY OF NEPAL AND THE 20,000-FEET HIMALAYAS



THE GOLD STATUE OF BHUPATINDRA MALL

breadth of it. He had climbed to the sacred Lake of Gosainthan, sixteen thousand feet high in the Himalayas, and had seen beneath its icy waters the temple of the god Mahadeo, and the god himself. Of the thousand pilgrims who started on that pilgrimage, as they do each year, only a hundred returned with him. The rest had died of cold and hunger. On the way back he had offered prayers for them at that other lake where great serpents lived in nests of snow.

Our little train staggered out of the jungle to a little station marked "Amelekhganj," at the end of the line, and we moved ourselves and baggage to a very ancient Buick which would take us a few more miles to Bhimphedi where the road ended and we should start the climb over the Himalayan foothills, the Mahabharat Range.

"Maharajah car," said the driver. "Thirty rupee." So that was it; and that would be it for the length of our stay. The Maharajah, running his ideal kingdom of Nepal like a private estate, would tax our every move for the privilege of peering into the last of the forbidden lands.

We rocketed out of Amelekhganj over an admirable but stony road. We climbed into the hills and looked down at bald, serrated escarpments of sandstone. The dry beds of cascades, which during the wet weather must have been torrential, swung past us, then great waterfalls sliding beneath the road, with the first clear water we had seen since Europe. We rounded a cliff on two wheels.

"This," said Leila, "is the end." I rather wished it were. I was so numb with the thought of imminent death that I could not feel Armand's lean knees boring through the cloth jump-seat and into my back. We careened over a ridge and volplaned down with the motor cut off, for our fiend of a driver was conservative with gas. He was so conservative with brake linings, too, that apparently he did without them.

"To die," quoth Armand, "when one reaches one's goal, to die in Paradise."

I reached over and slapped our driver on the back of the neck. "Slow down!" I shouted. "*Kubberdar!*" But when he screwed around in his seat to stare at me I just gave up and gently screwed his head back again until it faced the road ahead.

It was only on the upgrades that we had a chance to see the people of Nepal, lighter than the Indians and with the suggestion of Mongol heritage in their eyes and cheekbones, the men wearing a sort of white jodhpurs which fitted the calf and was surmounted by a flounce of shirt-tails around the waist. The collarless shirt overlapped itself at the throat and was held together by a civilized vest.

Little skull caps were perched jauntily on straight black hair. The women, with brilliant, belted dresses and gold earrings like carafe stoppers, marched sedately upon their errands. Tough, snappy little Gurkha soldiers saluted us, and pilgrims from Tibet, with square, seamed faces, glowered.

We came roaring through the sunlight, but ahead was a blue wall of rain joining neatly the peaks of the Mahabharat Range, a wall of mystery from Heaven to earth enclosing the sacred valley of Khatmandu. We bounced through a village of cane huts and ground to a stop before a gaping hole in a cliff a thousand feet high. A little shrine stood beside the cave, but to what god it was devoted I could not tell, the idol was so smeared with yellow and vermilion unguents which the devout had rubbed upon it to make their prayers adhere. Large and little bronzed and verdigrised bells were hung all over the shrine.

Our driver got out to buy a tiny red and yellow canna from an old man who sat at the entrance of the cave. He touched two fingers to a tray of red and yellow paints, tied the flower to the windshield, daubed his forehead with the paint, refreshing the caste-mark that is called a *tilka*, raised his two hands in prayer and quietly got into the car again.

None of us spoke. We also felt that we should be beholden

to the gods if they permitted us to pass in safety through the tunnel to the valley beyond. A secret land should be entered like this, I thought.

We roared away into the evil darkness, haunted with demons. Water dripped upon us from the timbers overhead and a gaseous odour caught at our throats. We tore along dizzily, regardless of anyone who should be coming towards us, and when we emerged into rain we felt we had sunk to another depth away from the world, through still another layer of reality towards a land which would exist, perhaps, only in our own dreaming minds. Perhaps there was no Nepal; perhaps these mountains and quiet valleys were an uninhabited place which men could people and make glorious only by their own imagining.

Without slackening speed our driver raised his hands again in thankfulness and we sped through great fields of corn that wound away over the hills to the north. A doe by the roadside gazed sweetly at us. We skidded through a village of houses which we were soon to recognize as typically Nepalese, chalet-style buildings with jutting eaves supported by carved struts out-thrust from white walls. Their windows were tightly grilled with intricately engraved lattices of wood. The cleanliness of the streets, the mountains, the air like a thin cologne, was reminiscent of Switzerland and Haute-Savoie. Nothing could be more unlike the swarming, festering India we just had left. There was peace on this land, and kindness. There was nothing to warn us that in the corners of it and the dark places, the temples and the secret courtyards, lay bleeding horrors which we should come to know and remember always. I was to smell blood at banquets in New York, and wake at night to the sound of gurgling death that was only my water faucet.

Now we were climbing steadily, to three thousand and four thousand feet according to Armand's altimetre, when suddenly we saw far ahead in the road a troupe of giant Hanuman

monkeys. They disappeared up the face of the cliff and we forgot them. Suddenly a boulder came hurtling just in front of the wheels of our car. An accident, we thought; a landslide. But we had not gone fifty yards when another terrific rock, weighing at least a hundred pounds, shot from the cliff above, bounced twice on the slope beside us, barely missed a fender and went plummeting into the river far below.

The driver held the accelerator to the floor and chattered wildly.

"He says it's the monkeys!" Chand told us. "They always throw stones when white people come."

It was incredible, but it was true as we saw a few minutes later. We were straining from the sides of that machine of hell, staring at the bare top of the cliff, when Jack shouted. The driver slammed on the brakes, which did not stop us at all, while we watched three old, grey monkeys crawling busily around a large rock which seemed to be balanced just on the edge of the cliff face. The car rolled steadily on. Jack flung himself over the front seat at the gear shift but Ram, Chand, and the driver were all blocking his way. We watched, fascinated and helpless, as the rock tipped slowly over the edge, then came straight for us. Jack groaned. Roy laughed. Ram, Chand, and the driver cowered beneath the dash. Armand whistled with sheer admiration at this zoological wonder. Leila swore shockingly. I just looked wondering vaguely whether I could recall these individual reactions when I should be writing books in some other life.

The rock landed like a meteor, five feet behind us, and stayed where it fell, half buried in the road.

"Step on it!" Armand bawled at the driver.

He did. We careened up hill around corners, while I fumbled for a cigarette and reflected upon this peaceful land which even the beasts wished to keep inviolate. The gods of rain, at least, had realized we would bring no harm to Nepal, for the blue mist was lifting as we approached

Bhimphedi, the town where we would spend the night. The sun, like a coin sinking into the dark fist of an Asiatic magician, slid smoothly into a crease of the mountains, and the last of its rays fell upon the high empty house which was to be ours.

We set the canvas cots on the stone-paved floors, rigged mosquito netting from wall to wall with a labyrinth of strings that confused us almost as much as the mosquitoes, and went out separately into the growing darkness to see what we could of the town before night filled it completely.

I should be contented here, I thought, but I was ill at ease. I should feel at home in the land I had sought from childhood, but I felt a stranger. Not an intruder. No ; I felt more like a ghost, barely visible, returning, a benign ghost of whom the villagers were quite unafraid. Most of them had probably never seen a white man, yet they showed no curiosity and were too polite to stare. Men smiled quickly in the candle-glow of their open shops and continued their selling of tobacco, small potatoes, onions, green peaches, cloth, filthy lump salt (the black kind which is supposedly aphrodisiac) and rice of various colours. Or they would look up from the games they played with cowrie shells or from the smoking of their silver-mounted water pipes, acknowledge me, then promptly forget what was just another ghost in their ghost-ridden land. Both men and women were only occasionally beautiful, but all showed a character which the bland natives of India lacked. They were a hardier people, of obvious pride and independence and there was not a beggar anywhere.

I followed music through the narrow stone streets until I came to a square that was filled with it, with the sound of various bells and of flutes and drums. Four groups of musicians sat at shrines devoted to Ganesh, Hanuman, Siva, and Bhairab, paying no attention to one another but each chanting and plying its instruments to attract the attention of its god. Our Princess in Calcutta had said that her people were musical ; they were once so famed as musicians, indeed,

that when Prithwi Narayan with his Gurkha army captured Kirtipur in 1765 he ordered the lips and noses to be cut from whoever could not play a musical instrument. The name of the city was changed thereafter to Naskatipur, "The City of Cut Noses," and, needless to say, it has fostered musicians ever since.

Without pausing in their song the first group gestured me to a place on the grand with them. They were swaying wildly, clinking small cymbals together, beating wildly with the heel of one hand and the fingers of the other upon conical drums which were painted black and red. One bearded virtuoso, holding a baby in his lap, played a kind of primitive harmonium with amazing dexterity. His hand was quicker than my eye, a blur of action, yet I felt that it was precise in its aim at the yellow keys even when it struck a note too lightly to sound. The rhythm was elusive; it was barbaric in beat yet sophisticated, with a subtle counterpoint of bell-notes and flute-notes and a whispering that overlaid the almost hysterical song.

High in the dark above us was the idol of Hanuman, the Ape, a figure of red clay obscenely dancing. And the great eyes of Buddha which we were to see everywhere throughout Nepal glared from the roofs of temples to remind man that Buddha watched his every move. This was The Land of the Eye.



20

Death in Heaven

ONE OF THE many fantastic anomalies of Nepal is this admixture of religions. Tibetan, Buddhism and Hinduism, which elsewhere are bitter rivals. The kindly tenets of Buddhism—which requires the more zealous of its priests even to strain the water they drink for fear of killing an invisible

insect—and the gory sacrifices of Hinduism seem naturally incompatible, but in Nepal they are so congenial that a temple to Kali, the Destroyer, will often be surrounded by little Buddhist shrines, or *chaityas*. Pilgrims travel a thousand miles from central India to make their devotions at Pashupatti, and pilgrims from Tibet stagger over passes in the Himalayas twenty thousand feet high to visit the Buddhist sanctuaries, for Gautama Buddha was born on the border of Nepal. Hinduism is now the religion of most of the Nepalese and Buddhism is being absorbed by it, as it has been in most of India, although a High Lama is still maintained at Khatmandu.

Our good man Chand had already assembled a crowd of sixty ragged, barefooted coolies when we wakened in the morning. The sun was just rising. The sky in the west was the tint of green apples, in the cloud-flecked east like apple blossoms, and the air had the scent of apples, sharp and sweet together. Now we could see that our village was ringed by its own mountains, a snug and compact place of thatched stone houses and narrow streets suddenly widening into squares where shrines, dragon-guarded, held gilt roofs to the first rays of the rising sun. The little bells of the morning devotion were ringing everywhere, and the white-robed worshippers, with silver mantra boxes and talismans around their necks, walked quietly to place offerings of flowers at the feet of their animal gods. A boy was laughingly riding a temple dragon. An old jeweller was busy incising a pair of enormous gold anklets to weight the wandering feet of some Nepalese wife. There were brilliant paper banners fluttering over his humble shop front, and as I stood watching there came from the woods a gold and silver peacock to alight upon his roof. This first town of Bhimphedi seemed a token of Nepal. In the very air of it was a feeling of peace and ease, of contentment and self-sufficiency. I was superfluous.

Our mechanic Jack was less interested in spiritual Nepal.

"Will you look . . ." he was saying. "For God's sake will you look at that?"

Following the ridge of a mountain and spanning a valley was the cableway which the Maharajah had built for the transport of his supplies, a splendid instrument of modern engineering running for seventeen miles across the Mahabharat Range to the ancient capital of Khatmandu. Travelling steadily at above five miles per hour the baggage swings rode up one cable and returned on the other, propelled by colossal machinery at each end. Our heavier baggage would travel in this way. It was another instance of the Maharajah's singular wisdom in importing the best that civilization could offer while strictly forbidding the civilized whites who, with their science, would also inevitably bring disease, discontent, and an alien politics to his happy people. The fact that there was electricity in Khatmandu, a university, a modern hospital, a highly trained army, made the land all the more fantastic when I considered its complete isolation from the rest of the world and the absolute secrecy with which it was guarded.

Our sixty coolies had contracted to carry us and our equipment over the mountains for three rupees, about a dollar, apiece—seventeen miles of terrible travel over two passes eight thousand five hundred feet high. The baggage would be borne on their backs, supported by head-straps of crude rope, and we were to be carried in curious litters, called "dandies" or "doolies" in the East since people of the exalted classes must never climb mountains on foot in Nepal. But no dandies arrived. We waited an hour with the coolies wrangling around us, fighting for the lighter loads while the headman good-naturedly walloped them across the ears and Roy with the Akeley made close-ups of bare feet that were cracked like lava fields and varicose veins like brains.

Pilgrims from India went by occasionally, blind to the world about them. They neither saw us nor that straight wall of mountain, the first serious barrier on their way to salvation.

There was a woman large with child, which would have birth on the banks of the sacred Baghmatti River, three old men plodding hand in hand, a *saddhu* with his begging bowl and iron tongs. And travelling among them like an inch-worm was a naked and ulcerous Hindu, measuring his length on the ground, standing, falling, stretching his claws as far as they would reach, then rising to walk three paces and repeat the performance. From time to time he shouted to the other pilgrims and they would reply. His eyes were staring. He was blind, but none the less he would make his pilgrimage across the mountains, naked in the rain and the bitter cold of the passes, grovelling towards his gods.

It was no use waiting any longer if we wished to reach the resthouse of Sisaghari that night. We would have to climb on foot, which was beneath our social dignity, of course, but we were toughened by adventure in Burma and China, we thought; a little Himalayan hike like this would be good for us.

We climbed, straight up for two thousand feet past small clouds like islands against the green sea of the mountain jungle. There was a path of sorts, strewn with boulders and crumbly underfoot. The hundred-pound loads of the coolie seemed to inconvenience them not at all and even the shaggy, bearded ancients and the coolie children tubercularly coughing passed us by. We, the hardened explorers, plodded, all but Leila who valiantly rushed even ahead of the porters so that she would have more time to sit and rest while the others of us were panting in her wake. I gulped for breath and felt my heart pounding on my Adam's apple, while far above us leered Leila, a lovely gargoyle reposing upon a rock. And higher still we could see our heavy baggage travelling comfortably along the cableway to Khatmandu, a tantalizing spectacle. In three hours it would be there, and it would take us two long hard days.

When we reached five thousand feet and sprawled along a

ridge while Ram cooked tea, we saw the valley for a minute clearly, the thatched cottages and shoe-string streets, the golden roofs of the little shrines; then swiftly they were obliterated by soft grey clouds, and the tops of pines on the mountainside showed mistily, floating. The purest rain in the world began to fall on us but we scarcely noticed; we were so enchanted by the scene and so exhausted that we could scarcely distinguish one discomfort from another. Our ragged porters sat among bluebells and small pink flowers, smoking brown cigarettes through their fists. They would clasp the cigarette between little finger and palm, fold the other fingers down to make a tube and suck noisily—a method which nearly asphyxiated us who tried it.

I felt my joints had welded when we got to our feet again and none of us were cheered when out of the fog burst the apparition of eight coolies yoked to the sort of dandy we had been promised. They came at a trot, chanting, and sitting high above their heads on a throne of black leather and red plush was a gigantic Brahman, bearded, turbaned, arrogant, contemptuous as only a Brahman can be who sees the despicable white man plodding under his own power through a land where the high-caste must be carried by his inferiors, whether beasts or men. He ignored us, but Armand, who once in his extraordinary career had been a monk in a Belgian monastery, called down a fine Flemish anathema upon his head. That cheered us somewhat, though we still kept peering through the fog for the dandies our headman had promised. We were not averse to riding as proudly as a Brahman now.

Jack climbed heroically fifty feet or so behind Leila, intent upon catching her when she would eventually collapse. He didn't know our Leila. He didn't know that the flush to her cheeks came less from exertion than from plain indignation that any mountain, even this lump of the Himalayas, should attempt to baulk her. Staggering along with his tropical

topi tipped back on his head, Jack would turn occasionally to yell at us, with a gesture towards the cloud-filled valley and the peaks beyond, "It's the nuts, isn't it? This sure is the nuts!" He had had little patience with the sweltering jungles of Burma; storm-racked China had been just a nuisance; the plains of India were dull; but Nepal was without question the nuts. Jack didn't care whether or not it was the most mysterious land on earth to-day, or that only a handful of white men had seen it before. It had the mountains where a man could breathe, and it had real men, our coolies. It was the nuts.

Gradually we caught up with the Indian pilgrims who had started ahead of us, and we felt considerably better about our prowess. The three old men were still walking hand in hand, a senile ballet as they leaped from rock to rock, and the pregnant woman was bravely climbing, her two hands clasped upon her abdomen. Ram and Chand, carrying only umbrellas as befitted the servants of sahibs, saluted the pilgrims haughtily then rushed ahead to try once more to hold the umbrellas over our heads. It was impossible to discourage them. Our guard and headman, a Gurkha with a great carved *khukri* in his belt and another incongruous umbrella in his hand, regarded us as idiots evidently, for he cast us baleful looks and shook his head, muttering.

The fog cleared sufficiently for us to see that we had a small valley to descend before climbing the final ridge, but it still hovered over our path. Suddenly a scream came slashing through it like a blade. Leila's scream. The echoes stabbed at us. Armand reached her first, then the rest of us in a stumbling mob.

"Look at him!" she cried. "Can't someone stop him? Ram! Chand!"

Inching down the valley path ahead of us was the blind Hindu who was attempting to measure his length to Khatmandu. He was flat on the ground, worming through wet

and jagged rocks, his blind eyes staring over a precipice and his arms like tentacles groping into space.

I thought the roaring in my ears was of my own blood, but the fog swerved again and beyond the prostrate pilgrim I saw a torrential waterfall, an intricate braid of silver hurtling straight down for a hundred feet. The man was too far for us to reach him in time. We yelled, we five and all the coolies, but our many voices must have been incoherent. He lifted his head listening. We could see his naked body tremble as he clawed with one hand at the air and with the other at a mossy stone.

"Oh, Lord, he's going!" Leila groaned.

We watched fascinated, futile. If the stone would hold . . . It was slipping . . . No! No! Don't move! Wait! . . . We shouted staggering towards him. One of his legs slipped over the edge; he clutched at the stone and it began to revolve in its bed.

"*Bandkaro ! Bandkaro ! Don't move !*"

His brown arched body vibrated against the blue white of the waterfall. The stone slowly turned beneath his fingers; the mossy side disappeared as it rose from its hole. Then the man was gone.

The fog filled the valley again. The waterfall that had swallowed him gleamed faintly, phosphorescently, and I hoped that somehow it might flow to one of the two sacred rivers of Nepal, to carry its pilgrim the rest of the journey which he had so faithfully begun.

It was a sober expedition that walked round the rim of that valley. We felt our way cautiously, hugging the cliff on our left, and crawled on hands and knees over the natural bridge that spanned the waterfall. Wild apple trees switched our faces in the mist and when we stumbled from the path we had to crawl through giant rhododendrons that reared like scraggy ghosts barring our way to their secret land. I felt it to be sinister now; the memory of the pilgrim could not be shaken.

Jack marched on doggedly, his topi square on his head for the first time since he had bought it in Rangoon.

"God!" he grunted. "If that's what these fancy religions will do to you, I'll just take mine straight! Judas!" said he.

We rose above the fog during the last five hundred yards to Sisaghari Fort and the sun fell golden upon the flight of steps approaching it. It was built of stone upon a pinnacle, connected to the main mountain mass by a drawbridge which looked dangerous even for its legitimate users, but the little Gurkha soldiers trotted complacently over it to welcome us with solemn smiles. No one could pass into or out of Nepal without being observed by the watchman of this eyrie. They had been advised of us by runner from Khatmandu.

We staggered up the stairs, our boots full of water, our clothes sopping, and limped along the high-crowned streets. We had hardly the breath to talk at this eight-thousand-foot altitude. Small boys, incurious of us, expertly played a game resembling marbles before a shrine with a roof of gold leaf. There were brass pennants flying stiffly on each side of it and a pair of great iron scales suspended from a gable, perhaps to weigh the sacrifice which God Hanuman, the monkey god, deserved for various favours. It was a marvel to me that Roy had any muscles that he still could manage, for he made funny faces at the boys and they howled with laughter. But after that effort he looked completely wilted.

The little houses were softly modelled of pink cement, with rounded corners inside, as we could see by the tapers illuminating the single rooms. Pure white geese pecked the golden corn on the jet-black doorsteps. Invisible doves were cooing, the exact watery sound made by the three girls, as lovely as any I had ever seen, who were washing clothes in a phallic fountain. They resembled Polynesians more than natives of the world's highest mountains. They laughed as we passed, a courteous laughter, and somewhere another woman was crying deeply.

The chicken we ate that night could no more relax its taut muscles than we, but we ate it down, whole muscles at a time, before the tiny fire of the huge rest-house which the Maharajah had built for his infrequent visits to India. I was content just to be sitting down somewhere in Nepal. Armand smiled at his chicken, placid and happy as only a director can be who has a new story, exclusively his own, to film. But Roy was ecstatic and active. Here, he said, was water, cold clean water such as we had had nowhere else for the developing of test strips from the film, an extremely important check on any motion picture work. In the jungles of Burma, even at night, when we would test the temperature of running streams which seemed actually cold to the hand, we found invariably that it was over eighty-five degrees, which necessitated the use of a hot water developer with consequently inferior results.

So Roy, weaving on his weary legs was as happy as a dry drunkard suddenly confronted with a drink. The rest of us drowsed by the fire, almost unaware of our stomachs' efforts to unknot that chicken's sinews, but Roy had his arms plunged to the elbows in the changing-bag, clipping off six-inch strips from his rolls of exposed film and winding them on to the developing reel. Ram and Chand watched him fascinated. His eyes stared blissfully into space; his hands made mysterious movements in the depths of the bag; there were snicking sounds and sounds of metal scraping metal like the sharpening of knives. And when the sorcerer began his falsetto rendering of "O Little Sir Echo, hello, hello!"—so rapturous was he—the poor natives fled to their pots and pans. And we to bed.



My Lord the Leech 21

THERE WAS CLEAR light over the mountains at six a.m., the sweet crisp dawn reflected from the high snowfields bordering Tibet just a few miles north. To the south we could see the hills we had already traversed, blue rolls of them rising from the marshy and malarial Terai. Far beyond lay the plains of India, and the world.

I came down to the flagged courtyard that ran straight to the edge of nothingness and found Jack examining professionally the five large dandies and the two small ones that at last had arrived for us. They were like palanquins, or litters, consisting of a hooded coffin-shaped box suspended on a single pole with pivoting crossbars, fore and aft, that rested on the shoulders of the eight coolies who carried each of them. The outside of the box was black wood, the inside red velvet; a sumptuous vehicle which we disdained at first, but very shortly were glad to have.

When the porters picked up the dandies and gestured us to climb in only Ram and Chand accepted, for the rest of us were secretly ashamed to be borne on the shoulders of these little men, although it was the custom here, and certainly no more shameful than riding in a Chinese rickshaw. Ram and Chand had no such qualms. Holding umbrellas against the bright morning sun they went swaying up the track ahead of us. We whites came next, on foot, assuring each other that, sure, we felt fine . . . sure, it *was* a fairly tough climb yesterday . . . no, not stiff at all. . . . And behind us stretched for half a mile our crew of sixty coolies. The last of them, a boy of ten, carried on his head the two baskets containing our Chinese cat and Indian mongoose.

Here the track was wide but rough, filled with boulders as big as a man, and bordered by pines and false teak. Small, tight, orchidaceous blossoms shone like jewels against the

green velvet foliage, but on almost every one there was a leech, balanced on his tail and waving his blunt head to reach for man or beast that passed along the trail. One of the many amazing things about this unpleasant creature is that he can work from either end, for he has suction cups at both. He lies limp upon his throne of blossom until somehow he becomes aware that you are passing, then rears up, waves like a tentacle and fastens to feed.

We climbed to eight thousand five hundred feet and rounded a shoulder of the mountain to see the Himalayas briefly, pink and white against a pastel blue of sky. Gosainthan with its serpent lakes was straight ahead; Nanda Devi, 26,661 feet high, was just over there to the left with Nanga Parbat only a few feet lower. Remote on the north-eastern horizon, behind a wall of snow, we could see one golden point like a fulcrum to support the skies—Mount Everest, the highest thing on earth.

Armand had stopped ahead of us, a giant silhouetted against a gigantic world.

"We've got to shoot this, Roy. Ram! Chand! We'll get in the dandies, and tell the men to back up. Look, Roy, why don't you try it from that slope there? Dave, get a production shot with Roy working in the foreground."

The coolies dragged the cameras up the hill. I hauled myself hand over hand to a ledge above Roy's position, trying at the same time to protect the two Leicas, the Super Ikonta and the Graflex with which I was draped—a walking Wiloughby's. It was an exciting scene with the seven dandies bearing Armand, Leila, Jack, Ram and Chand across the back-drop of glacial mountains, the coolies steaming in the frosty air. But we had scarcely focussed when a long tongue of fog licked the scene away from us. It was as though the whole expedition had been swallowed by the mountain's maw.

Now that three-fifths of the expedition were already seated in the dandies it was neither hard for them to stay there nor

shameful for Roy and me to heave our weary bones and cameras aboard. I took the lead in mine, facing backwards so that I could film the rest of the expedition. No one looked very comfortable, and Armand's eight men careened dangerously beneath his lean but long two hundred pounds. There was a pest of a lad vaguely attached to his company who kept circling around the barrow trying to help, but he was so small that he had to hunch his shoulder to touch the pole. The men on the precipice side carried long staves to prop them against crumpling into the ravine if they should stub their toes.

I couldn't avoid the faces of the porters bearing me, nor the row of ragged diagonal left shoulders under my rear crossbar. One lifted his fingers to his mouth beseeching a cigarette, but when I gave it to him already lighted he smiled a sickly apologetic smile and dropped it over the cliff, for although he was a pariah in caste I as an infidel had polluted the tobacco with my lips. I passed him another which he lighted at a trot and lent in turn to his three companions, and when it was returned to him it was soaked with the sweat that dripped from their noses. One of my men had a sort of windy spasm, a clotted breathing that seemed to shudder through the wood of my barrow, and another groaned though my weight of a hundred and sixty pounds amounted to no more than twenty pounds upon the shoulders of each of the eight men. The baggage coolies carried sixty at least.

Armand was close behind me as we started the descent from the next pass of Chisapani to the vale of Chitlung. I squatted to focus the Leica upon him, first with a long lens stopped at f.3.5. to haze the background, then with the two-inch, using both at one-thousandth of a second because of the jolting of our two dandies which would doubly blur any film taken at a lesser speed. One of his men was blind in one eye, one limped, and one was an albino, as pink and white as a baby, and pimpled dark red.

There was a clatter from behind and the coolies jammed

against the mountain wall. There was a shout like a frightened cowboy's and down came Roy upon a horse which none of us had seen before, a nag on roller skates, it seemed, until our intrepid cameraman introduced it as a boon from the Maharajah himself, sent to relieve us if we were tired of dandies. Roy was for prancing on ahead to film the descent of the expedition down this almost perpendicular valley, but Armand stopped him.

"We can't do it, Roy. It's too cruel. We know that if the Maharajah should ever hear that we walked into Khatmandu we'd lose so much face that he'd never help us at all, but damn it, you can't show American audiences a picture of grown men being carried by their poor little brown brothers: the lame, the halt, and the blind. I know it's a wonderful shot. . . . Damn it, let me try that horse."

Armand tried it and Leila tried it, a-spraddle and side-saddle, and so did I; and when the horse bit me, as horses invariably do, Jack, singing "Home on the Range," mounted the beast and tried to post it. Downhill. The Maharajah's Boon slipped with all four feet and ended by leaning at a forty-five-degree angle against a tree.

Thereafter the animal was led riderless by the male nurse who had been sent with him and who kept assuring Chand that the Maharajah would be very, very displeased at the snub.

We crossed a river full of cyclopean boulders in clear, blue, icy water, the melting of snow, and struggled uphill again, the coolies dripping from their vests and kilt-like shirt-tails. The jungle was so dense here that we had to shield our faces from the broad slapping leaves. The tinkle of a bell reached me from the green darkness ahead and grew quickly louder until suddenly just at my side there flashed a nearly naked runner holding a bamboo tube to which were attached two brass bells—the mail runner on his way from Bhimphedi to Khatmandu. All mail was carried into the country thus, by men trained from childhood to trot the seventeen mountainous

miles without a stop. The bell was to warn all ahead of him to clear the way, or get food ready to hand him as he ran. And to advise them also that should its tinkling cease, if for only a moment, they might obtain a fine reward from the government for this information. The punishment of the weary runner we were to witness later on.

As I crouched in the dandy, dodging the wet leaves or fending them off as best I could with one hand while trying to use the camera with the other, a pain like the stab of a lance shot through my throat. I clapped my fingers to the upturned collar and felt a wad of flesh, slimy and hot, upon it. It was a leech bloated with my own blood. Though I had spent most of my life in tropical jungles and known the leech as intimately as any man can, still my stomach turned over with nausea at the thought of it, while carefully, holding its pulp of a body between two fingers, I touched it with my cigarette. There is no other way to remove them; if you attempt to pull them loose your skin comes too, and instead of the pain lasting but an hour or two—as it does when you burn them off—you will have an ulcerous sore for days.

I had just pressed my hand to my throat and withdrawn it covered with blood when I felt a stab of pain in the groin. There were three leeches there, maroon-coloured slugs sucking through the tough wool of my trousers. I was burning these off when another needle of pain shot into my ankle, and I knew that somehow, despite the high boots, a leech had entered, probably through an eyelet. I sucked hard on my cigarette and tasted the burning of blood, my blood, and as I peeled off the boot I saw that the faces and throats of the four coolies ahead had each one leech or more upon them.

Armand's voice came shouting through the jungle, then Chand's shrill cry of "*Bandkaro! Bandkaro! Stop!*" We tumbled from the dandies and smoking furiously burned the dollops of blood-gorged flesh from each other's bodies.

Leila, I think, was the only one who even attempted to be calm about it. And she had leeches in her hair.

We leaped to one side to make room for six oxen which were coming from Chitlung. Their eyes and their nostrils were streaming blood. Their lips were festooned with leeches in scarlet embroidery. Some could scarcely see and stumbled on aching legs, swinging pathetic heads from side to side against the branches in a blind effort to wipe the loathsome little monsters off. But whatever branch struck them deposited more.

"This never occurred to Dante," said Armand, trying to detach a particularly hardy leech which now seemed to be trying to suck the tobacco from his cigarette. "Get out your soap and rub your hands and faces with it. It will help a little."

My soap was the particularly odorous sort that comes in oval cakes, and is bought by old English gentlewomen. My gentlewoman had thought I might like a touch of something nice during the Spartan days we should be enduring in Nepal; I had never the heart to tell her afterwards that almost I should prefer to have leeches in my bath to that cloying lavender leech-lotion with which I now was smeared.

Through the trees we saw the valley, planted with corn, a sweep of yellow and green tipping from half-way up the next and last range of mountains between us and Khatmandu. The trees thinned, and a butterfly emerged from them as big as my hand. A beetle the size of a peach was heading for India by a secret beetle path on a ledge at the level of our eyes; another beetle followed, and a third, a dung-beetle, diligently rolling over and over a ball of dung, somersaulting beneath it, walking over its top until he fell upon his head, scrabbling to heave a shoulder under the lump that was twice as big as he and move it to the main path again. He, I suppose, was the pariah of this pilgrimage.

Roy would have stopped his dandy to give crumbs or

leeches, fed with his own blood, to these poor pilgrims, as he had fed the ants in Burma, if Jack's porters behind him had not jostled his. The two dandies heaved and rolled. The porters exchanged blows good-naturedly and would have engaged in a wrestling match despite their human burdens, but our headman rushed immediately to the battle, furling his umbrella and belaboured the men so wildly with it that Jack got a smart wallop across the knee. The umbrella bent like a hairpin on the limb of our iron mechanic. Jack howled for vengeance; the headman wailed that Jack had ruined his emblem of office. It required considerable diplomacy on Armand's part to settle matters and get us under way again.

We trotted through the tiny village of Markhu, an L-shaped street of thatched houses that were brilliant with the clusters of red and yellow corn drying at almost every window, then up over the rolling Ekdunta hills to race the rain across the vale of Chitlung—little Nepal as it is called by the people. But the rain caught us. The coolies slipped and stumbled, and the headman made desperate moans while he waved his broken umbrella with one hand and fingered his long-bladed *khukeri* with the other. I had never liked the look of him, and now there was a nasty glint in his eyes when he turned to glare at us impartially.

"Tell him," Armand shouted to Chand, "that I'll buy him two new umbrellas." He looked none the happier for that.

We reached an ancient hostel before the dandies were completely drenched. It was uninhabited now, but the long porch gave us shelter while we ate a lunch of sardines and cold beans. The coolies, grouped as close to us as possible to see the wonders we performed, stuffed wads of rice into their faces and took time at last to remove the leeches from their bare legs. It was an unappetizing performance.

Here we saw the first fine example of the old Newar architecture. Every inch of wood outside the hostel had been exquisitely carved by the aborigines of the valley. The struts

supporting the wide eaves bore processions of lizards swallowing each other's tails, and the doorways, superbly proportioned, were flanked with rows of ducks and little gods. Wooden flowers grew everywhere. Vines twisted along the lintels. There was no waste and yet no jumbling of decoration, and the minutest design was religiously symbolic, an emblem of some sacred tale of long ago. There is no art for art's sake among the Nepalese.



22 **Maybe an Automobile**

WE HAD TO decide now whether or not we should film the dandies, for the climb to Chandraghiri pass would be the last before entering the great valley of Khatmandu. The objection to the scene was obvious: there would be many among our untravelled audience at home who would look aghast at supposedly democratic American explorers being carried by their brothers-under-the-skin, particularly since our brown brothers looked none too healthy, were streaked with blood, and stumbled often. On the other hand our portrayal of Nepal would be dishonest if we did not show it. We must emphasize on film, as I do here, that the caste-system of Nepal, contrary to that of India, apparently causes very little unhappiness among the poorer people; it is their right, they feel, to earn their pittance by carrying the more fortunate over those terrible mountains. They have no word for democracy, and until they progress to the coinage of one they will be suspicious of white man or Brahman who will so bemean himself as to walk when he can afford to ride. That, they feel, is (1) lowering the prestige they admire, (2) refusing employment to those in need of it, and (3) affronting the very gods who had deliberately arranged life so that the rich

should be rich and the poor should be poor and never the twain should meet.

"Finally," said Armand, climbing into his dandy again, "Nepal has kept its integrity and independence largely because of these same mountain barriers. Everything that goes into the country must be borne on the backs of men, with the result that the Nepalese have become the toughest porters in the world, so far as I know; and the Arctic is about the only place I haven't been in. Look: in Nepal men even carry men, and that's certainly of sociological importance to any thinking audience. Isn't it? Particularly when you remember that this country has *never* been filmed. . . . All right, Roy and Dave, set up. We'll shoot the dandies starting here."

Roy jajoled his way onto a balcony of one of the houses along the way. I smiled at an antique man who was squatting in his doorway cooking *chupattis*, a sort of pancake, and he permitted me to straddle the flame so that I could be far enough from the street to get most of the expedition on my still film. I heated considerably.

From then on we walked, Roy and I, most of the way to Khatmandu; or rather we ran, for the dandy porters made good time, and in order to get approach shots we, with the coolies lugging our equipment, had to be far enough ahead to set up and be ready to film as the expedition passed. Then we would scramble to pack the precious lenses, fold the gangling legs of the tripods and rush panting ahead again.

"How'd it look, Roy?" Armand would call as we rushed past at approximately half a mile an hour and Roy would say "Fine." He always said "Fine." An expert and honest cameraman was Roy.

Again we were climbing, past splendid waterfalls with primitive, thatched mills set in caves beneath them. The earth changed to a red clay, as slippery as vaseline, that was more exhausting to trudge through than the boulders of the

Sisaghari trail. Jack walked with us now to help carry the delicate equipment which we would not trust to the porters, but Armand and Leila had to stay with the dandies for the sake of the film. Hard as was the climbing in that clay, I far preferred it to the bone-breaking ride in the dandies. Armand seemed visibly to shrink as his vertebræ ground one upon another. The coolies jogged along in step with the result that the dandy rider bounced at least six inches with every step. It was impossible to get them to stagger their individual rhythms so as to neutralize the bounces. Armand's dandy was the least popular among them, for he weighed a good deal more than any of the rest of us, but none the less the coolies bearing the vacant barrows would fight to relieve those stumbling under his. They would receive the same pay in the end, but by some curious proud reasoning they would not see their fellows earning the reward more diligently than they.

A strange, clamorous sound came from the fog ahead, a weird chanting with hysterical high notes. Armand raised his hand and our caravan stopped, listening.

"For God's sake, what's that?"

All the coolies gabbled at once. Ram, our warrior cook, bellowed at them. Little Chand, not to be outdone, clipped one of them across the ear and tried to make out what he was saying.

"Maybe he say, sahib, it is an automobile."

"Maybe he says so, does he? Don't be silly! What could an automobile be doing here? Does it sound like an automobile? It's more like a riot, I'd say. Ask someone else."

Chand started to clip the headman by mistake, then quickly collared another coolie. The headman glared and reached for his blade again.

"Maybe this one say," said Chand, "it is an automobile too."

"Let's go," Armand commanded. "Maybe this is not preposterous, but we'll find out in a minute. There can't be an automobile for hundreds of miles. How the devil could a car get here? And make that god-forsaken sound?"

The discordant, desperate chanting broke out again as we slithered up through the mud. We turned round a rock pinnacle, climbed vertically again, with Armand and Leila, poor souls, reclining on their backs as the dandies, inched upwards. We saw ahead of us suddenly a mass of figures such as one should supposedly see in a crystal globe, opalescent in the fog, dim and without heads, straining. There were dozens of them, yoked together. We couldn't see their faces for they were bent nearly to the ground. We were hardly sure that they were men.

They were less than men, or more. There were seventy-seven of them, carrying upon their shoulders by an elaborate arrangement of ropes, poles, and yokes, the incredible burden of an automobile, a 1925 Dodge sedan. Two-thirds of them were in front pulling. The others surrounded the car, their shoulders straining against the crossbars of bamboo which passed beneath the chassis, while a dozen of the sturdiest pushed from behind, slewing the car around corners and bracing it when the front men had to ease up because of sudden ledges which blocked the path. Except for the wheels, which were carried on the backs of four female coolies, the car had not been dismantled.

"Maybe an automobile?" said Chand sweetly.

Maybe, I thought, this height has affected my head. That whole automobiles should be carried over the Himalayas by these little men was simply inconceivable. That there should be cars at all in the valley of Khatmandu was absurd. We didn't know then that three steam rollers had been transported in just this way, and one bronze equestrian statue which must have weighed two tons.

Singing in the fog and the rain, the mass of coolies struggled

upwards, their voices shrilling occasionally when the strain seemed more than they could bear; hysterical voices; a sudden shout among them as some youngster felt his heart breaking on that rocky road. Roy, filmed their legs, tense, shuddering with exhaustion. I filmed their faces, their mouths open around black teeth and yellow tongues, but all their eyes placid, resigned. Their leader was carried with them on the front bumper of the car. He danced up and down upon it, conducting the chant and threatening the coolies with a long switch of bamboo. They would surge forward for a hundred feet or so, then rest a moment, their breath whistling like a great wind in the eaves, then their leader's voice would rise to a new fury of chanting and again they would lunge up the mountain, yowling, cursing, weeping the song.

They made almost as good time as our own coolies. Armand climbed ahead to film them, for Roy and I were dead on our feet. "Send up the sound!" he shouted. We unpacked the heavy sound-recording equipment and sent it ahead under the belligerent supervision of Ram and Chand. We could see Armand from time to time as the fog shifted, perched high on a rock like a flexible giraffe, his long legs planted wide, his body arched over the microphone. Though he might be a-crawl with leeches, smeared with mud and torn by the jagged rock of the climb, he would be ecstatically happy to record on film, with the amazing devices he himself had invented, the typical sounds of Nepal. His previous film, "Dark Rapture," had been made especially valuable to students of African culture by such precise recording. Whereas the average director of travel films is content to "dub" the sound when he gets back to his studio, Armand felt there was no honest way of reproducing the customs of strange peoples other than by first-hand and spontaneous recordings in the field.

Roy had reached him now and set up the mammoth camera which, by some magic I never could understand, transferred

sound and scene to a single film. Leila was busy with the 16 mm. colour camera. I, with notebook in one hand, a Leica in the other and the Super Ikonta slapping my thorax with every step, tried to cover the scene from behind, keeping low enough, or attempting to look sufficiently like a coolie, to be unnoticeable.

Almost invariably any effective scene which you see in a travel film, though it may be absolutely authentic, has been staged. This is true of our own, of course. It is an unromantic necessity, but there is no other way. Paradoxically, it is almost impossible to make native actors look authentic unless you make them act. In Africa, in the remotest jungle, if you were to film, for instance, a native dance without the knowledge of the dancers, you would more than likely find when the film was developed that somewhere in the crowd was a man wearing spats or a shirt, and your audience of wiseacres would cry, "Yah! Hollywood!" Conversely, if you stage the scene artificially, with attention to lighting, composition, and the elimination of non-essentials, such as spats and shirts, if you have your dancers drilled to perform only the act indigenous with them, and not imported, like spats or shirts, by some misdirected Arab trader, then your scene will look authentic to Africa—and be so, too.

But these Nepalese wouldn't act. They had no time for us. They were occupied with the herculean task of carrying an automobile over the mountains, and though we had white faces such as most of them had never seen they looked in preference at the rocks beneath their feet and heaved steadily ahead. We could not stop them. Chand waved a fistful of exotic Nepalese silver beneath their noses. They spurned it, and they would have climbed right over Armand and his infernal machines if he had not suddenly got out of their way.

Chanting, groaning, crying to their gods, they passed into the mists again, seventy-seven robots roped to an alien engine in which they would never ride, for all cars in Khatmandu

(and there were several hundred, as we later learned) were the possessions of the royal families only. The common man was forbidden this symbol of prestige.

The trees thinned as we approached the pass, whereas on Sisaghari they had been jungle-thick. The rain flattened the poor grass that had barely squeezed through the viscous clay. Occasionally we would see—but far from the track—a hut built of the same clay, red half-way up its walls, then painted white to the eaves. A lovely child, a girl with brass earrings the size of demitasse saucers, flitted like a nymph from tree to tree before us for quite a long while, smiling and disappearing again.

Jack, our only bachelor, grunted. "O.K.," he said. He strode along over mud and rocks, his topi so sopped that it curved down over one eye, his raincoat flapping behind him, his huge black Burma cheroot shooting sparks and smoke like a locomotive. He was still singing "Home on the Range." An old woman materialized as mysteriously as the girl—all Nepal must have somehow known that we were coming—and snarled into each dandy as it passed, holding her hands cupped for alms. The last one in line was Jack's empty, but she pursued it through the treacherous mud with outstretched hands until she realized her errand was hopeless. She must have been in India at one time, and have known white sahibs, for she was the only true beggar we met in Nepal. The *saddhus*, the holy men, were exceptions, of course; they begged for reasons which might be to us obscure but were to them divine.

The track was almost perpendicular now. We were near the pass and I felt exultant that soon I should look down upon the valley which had been my dream of Utopia since I was a child, a place so outlandish that not even the philatelists I knew in New York had ever heard of it—the sure test of obscurity for a country that has its own postal system and manufactures stamps. Just now the obscurity was actual and

the sun only a brassy blur on the rim of the mountains of the west. There was scarcely light enough for proper exposure, but the scene was so dramatic—with our coolies and their burdens like parading ghouls, the mysterious palanquins swaying amidst them as if carrying souls to hell—that we attempted one final shot with the lenses wide at f.2. The grade was so steep that there was a difference of nearly a yard in the height of the front and rear tripod legs.

"Ready?" Armand called.

"All right, come ahead."

Roy had started to crank—he claimed he never could get the "feel" of a motor-driven camera—when an apparition came downhill past our view-finders, a boy coolie, as grey of face as the fog, carrying a behemoth of a woman upon his back. She rode facing backwards in a basket which was suspended by rope straps looping the boy's shoulders and forehead. After that we had no further qualms about shooting the dandies.

They came careening up to us, the porters dragging themselves along with their free hands seeking a grip upon the rocks, faltering, groping, falling against cruel flint. Armand winced when they went down, but we had to film it. It was a heartless land and must be heartlessly filmed if our document were to be of value at all.



Terror in the Night 23

THE LAST STRETCH of trail was a continuous zigzag of slime and rocks that came rushing upon us whenever we touched them. I crept on all fours, remembering too vividly the poor pilgrim who had catapulted down to death. I embraced the trees like brothers and passed from trunk to

trunk. Ten feet gained. Twenty-five. The ground was flattening. I could almost walk erect, unaided. Then I suddenly reached level earth, and saw the mountain slope down in front of me, the Chandraghiri pass. I stared. There below lay the valley of Nepal and legendary Khatmandu. Fog filled it. There lay the last home of mystery—a perfect blank.

I leaned against a tree, exhausted, my breath snorting in my throat, my heart drumming and my ears singing a weird accompaniment. There was the valley, somewhere in a dirty lather of fog. I kept on staring. No fog I had known was as dense as this, an opaque gun-metal grey in its frame of rhododendron branches. But no fog I had known had wrinkles in it either, and shuddered when you looked at it. I shuddered too. I clutched my tree and blinked when suddenly the wrinkles changed their course and the fog heaved above the branches. It was moving towards me, tapering towards me, stretching in a long soft mass about four inches thick at its approaching end. Look, Davy, I thought, just hold on and breathe deeply; it's the altitude, you know, and exhaustion; your mind's all right. I turned to yell at Armand, who was close behind, as that gigantic polyp of fog waved through the bushes. It was like the trunk of an elephant. It was, by God, the trunk of an elephant.

I leaned limp against my friend the tree and watched the father and mother of elephants rise colossally over the ridge. A Nepalese youth, ensconced in gold and scarlet cushions, rode upon that Himalayan back. It was too much. I sat down there. The elephant came straight towards me, but I didn't care any more. You can't be trampled to death by dreams. The regal youth prodded the mahout on the elephant's head and passed him a scroll of paper. The mahout prodded the elephant in turn, and a moment later, just when I had decided that this might after all be real and had opened my mouth to howl, the grey trunk undulated almost into it and passed me the scroll.

It did not, to my further surprise say "Try Toni's Tea" or "Fenton's for Fun, 50 Nifties 50." It was beautifully written in Sanscrit, which is still the written language of Nepal, and, I never did learn its message, for the characters were apparently painted with a Chinese brush and were shortly washed away by blood and rain when I put it in a pocket through which a leech had bitten me.

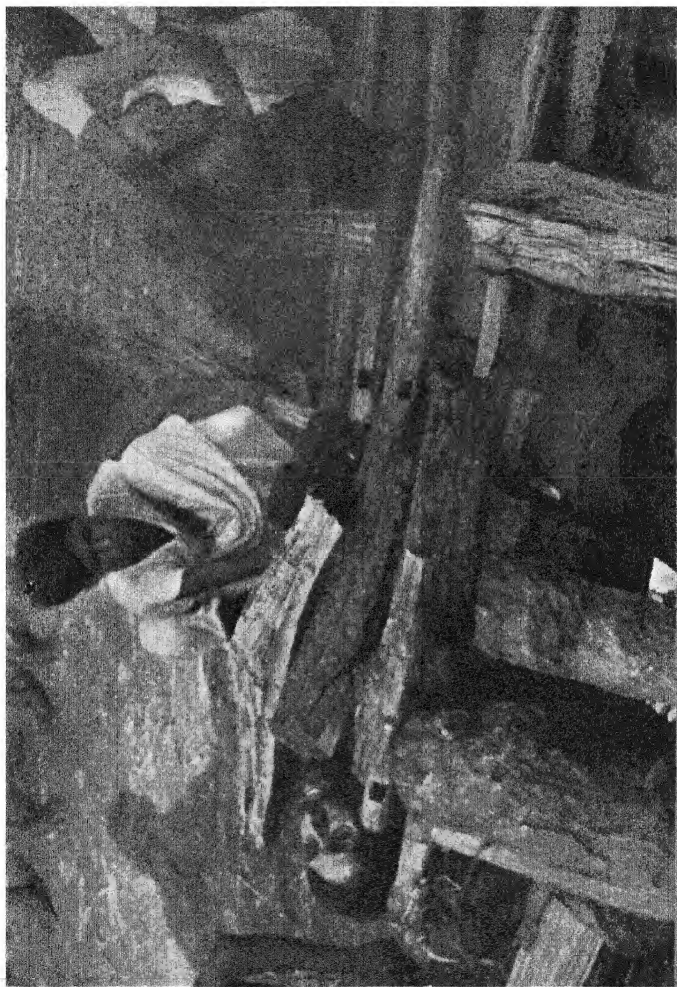
The youth and his elephant passed majestically down the path by which we had come. Our coolies were restless. They were on the home stretch now and seemed panic-stricken that the delays caused by our photography would bring them to Khatmandu after dark. We were urged into the dandies again so that they could make greater speed and started down the mountain at a pace that chattered my teeth like castanets. I bit my tongue. I bit half an inch from the end of a cigarette and nearly swallowed the match which I was trying to make meet it. An icy wind whipped over the Himalayas and whirled the fog around us in great clots which now I could not be certain were not elephants; the wind blew harder, steadily from the north, until suddenly, though for less than a minute, the valley shone clear below us, a lambent jewel-box of a country touched by the last light of the sun.

I had scarcely a gasp left in me, but I gasped now at the beauty of this amazing secret place, as remote as hell, or heaven, from the travels of Europeans. In all history less than two hundred white men had been permitted the view we had before us, of range upon range of the snow-capped Himalayas cupping a valley only fifteen miles long by about thirteen wide but inviolate as no other spot in the world, with the exception of Lhasa itself, will ever be. In early days the valley was called Nag Hrad, the Tank of the Serpent, and it is geologically evident that at one time it must have been a lake. The Buddhists credit Manjusri and the Hindus Vishnu with cleaving the mountain to drain the lake down the river now known as the Baghmatti.

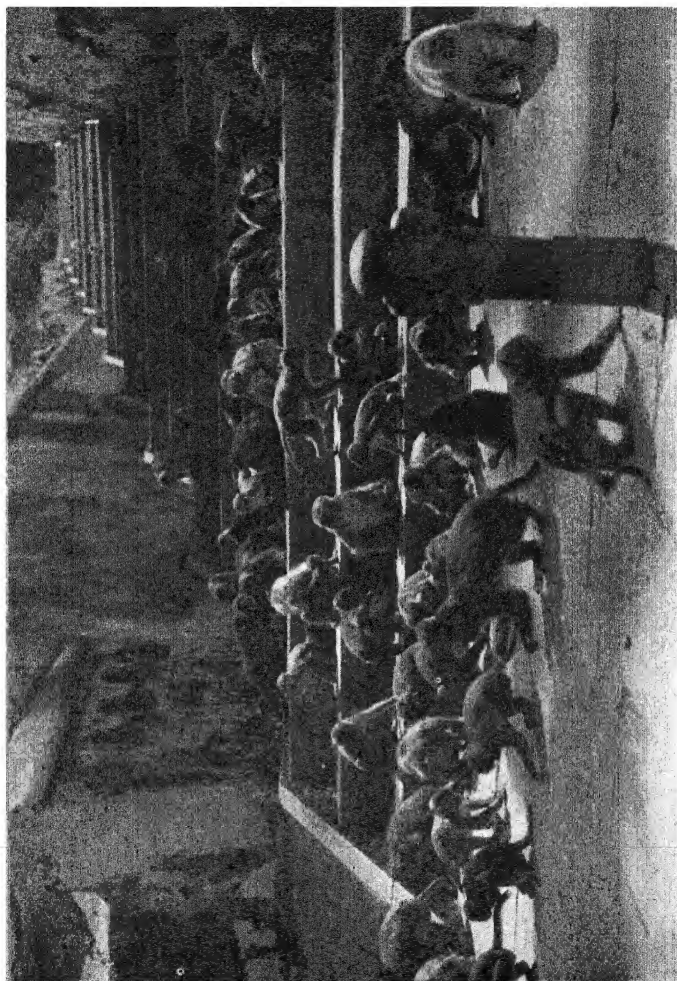
Four thousand feet below us and four thousand five hundred feet above sea level lay this enchanted place, its three major cities gleaming where the shadows had not yet reached the palaces of marble and the temple roofs of gold. There was Khatmandu, whose very name was awesome, and Bhatgaon, Kirtipur, Patan, jewelled miniature cities snug in the folds of green velour. The valley to the west was twisted, hummocked, hacked in fantastic shapes, the result of ancient erosion, and to the east rose tier upon tier of terracing, a swirling flight of steps growing gradually fainter and tighter together as they climbed the mountains.

"Look," Leila said, but when I turned to look in the direction she was pointing that whole half of the valley was almost instantly obliterated by a mass of fog, a rolling avalanche that seemed propelled by the million spikes of rain behind it. The opposite mountains disappeared. Even the trees a few yards ahead of us wavered indistinctly like things seen through someone else's glasses. The fog darkened, the trees vanished. The sun had set in this moment and the world was suddenly black.

A terrible cry of fear went up from our sixty coolies. The demons would get them now. We lighted flashlights and Armand harangued them in a language they could not understand but which must have frightened them more than the demons, for they picked us up again and continued down the mountain at a frantic trot. The rain came at us like birdshot, tearing at our faces and hands. Even with my eyes closed my eyeballs ached from the beating of it. A huge flare of lightning showed the terrible descent before us. Thunder crashed and reverberated, echoing among glacial mountains that were five miles high, and with each burst of it the coolies would cry desperately, "*Narain-ab ! Narain-ab !*" calling out to their god Narain to preserve them. And again when we overtook an old man who bore a frightened calf in the basket on his back they called to him, "*Ab naheen ab !*" to exorcise him if he should be a ghost.



THE PLACE OF THE DEAD



THE MONKEY-INFESTED STEPS OF THE
ANCIENT PASHUPATTI TEMPLE

I turned my light on Roy's dandy, thirty feet behind and at right angles above me. It was rocking like a ship and Roy looked like some sea-ghoul huddled in it, his eyes glaring and teeth clenched, the rain falling like tassels of seaweed from his hat. There was a dark lump on one cheek, a leech ; he was unaware of it. The face of one of his coolies was contorted, sobbing. He was a boy I had noticed before because his clothes seemed slightly better than the others' and he had allowed the little fingernail of his right hand to grow over two inches long in pathetic pretence that he was a lad of leisure. He was only a fear-sick coolie now, crying in the night, not against the labour to which he was quite accustomed, but against the gods who had so forsaken him.

I felt a bit forsaken myself, when I could feel anything other than the jounces which were gradually mashing my liver flat. It was not hard to imagine that strange gods were aware of us, of our intrusion, when we reached the lower levels of the mountain and saw by lightning the little phallic shrines beside the path, and heard the cry of sixty men as we passed : "*Narain-ab ! Narain-ab ! Narain-ab !*"

There was no stopping them now. We could see lights in the rain ahead : Tauncot, the first village of the valley. Our track became a road. Voices called to us. We jogged jauntily through the village, the coolies shouting greetings to their friends with the news, probably, that they had brought the weirdest collection of pale bipeds that any of them had ever seen. The rain propitiously slackened while we crossed this comfortable but perfectly dull country that was the valley floor. An automobile zoomed directly at us, passed by with an inch to spare. The lights were on inside it, and there I could see three men with jewelled turbans pretending that they weren't looking at us at all. The car zoomed back and disappeared ahead, but for a minute only. Again it came full speed along that abominable road and past my dandy with several millimetres to spare. My coolies jumped and said

never a word, but I made sounds which would be intelligible to any pale biped and flashed my powerful torch upon the retreating car. It was painted gold, entirely gold, even to the spare tyre on the back. Some royal emissary had come to inspect us, I supposed. Then for the last time it shot past toward the heart of Khatmandu.

Our headman sprinted to a guardhouse on the road and we plainly saw that he was telephoning, announcing our actual arrival, probably, to the Durbar and the Maharajah's men. The car and the telephone together, here in the midst of what is commonly called the "Himalayan fastnesses," made me fearful of finding a Hollywood Shangri-la. And when we stopped at the edge of Khatmandu, before a miniature palace surrounded by a high wall of concrete lattice, when we debarked stiffly from the dandies amidst a horde of coolies who were all denouncing their headman as a thief, a cheat of their monies (we had not seen him since he telephoned), when we paid them for the second time because we were too damned weary to argue and were wet and hungry and thick with leeches, we were at first amused by the girl baby who circled the four men of us whining something that sounded like "Daddy! Daddy!" She wasn't begging; she simply plucked at our sleeves in a proprietary way, welcoming us, perhaps, as if we had abandoned her once and had now returned. I had the uneasy feeling that there might be more to the reincarnation business than I had believed, that maybe I had indeed been so indiscreet as to have fathered this brat in some previous existence and had now come home to meet my responsibilities. I looked around anxiously for the good wife I had forgotten—a thin-lipped woman she would be—but there was only this child whining "Daddy!"

Leila, clear of conscience, stood in the rain and laughed at our discomfiture until a grizzled old dotard sidled up beside her and nearly bowled her down with a blast upon his flute. It was an odd instrument of wood with a jade mouthpiece

at one end and a crumpled brass horn at the other, but it made an outrageous din. The old man pranced about her, tootling. I whipped out the Woolworth kazoo which I used to distract the attention of crowds from our cameras and tootled back at him. He tootled louder, doing an intricate *pas seul* around me and my brat. I roared into the kazoo but his tootle was by far the louder and he triumphantly drowned me out.

Meanwhile the rest of the expedition had escaped from the daddy-seeker, and I jumped after Armand through the gate. The guard slammed it. We had arrived. And we collapsed as well as one can upon straight chairs of chromium such as are found in hospital rooms.

"So this," said Leila, "is the heart of Asia. Exotic, what?" Armand closed his eyes before the horror of it all. I looked glumly at the green glass chandelier, the flowered congoleum rugs, the antimacassars on the backs of the chromium chairs. If we could have cried I think we would have done so. We went to bed without our supper.



Khatmandu

24

IT WASN'T QUITE so bad in the morning when we arose to a sunlit day. We walked in the garden that surrounded the resthouse, waiting for some move of recognition from the Maharajah. The air was soft as gold leaf against our faces and the snow-peaked mountains seemed to reflect the sunlight blandly across the world.

Chand, returning from market, rushed up to Armand excitedly. "Subha, he come," he said. "Prepare!" He rushed to the kitchen quarters.

We were debating whether we should get out guns or

drinks, when a natty young man followed his moustache into our garden. He wore the white leggings typical to Nepal, a grey tweed coat and a sort of black fez on which the national coat-of-arms—two crossed swords, a jewelled helmet, the soles of two bare feet, a seven-pointed star and a new moon—was embroidered in silver. Steel-rimmed glasses sea-sawed across his nose.

He bowed to each one of us and shook our hands. The breath sizzled between his teeth as he held up a little card for us all to read. It said: OFFICER IN CHARGE OF HOSPITALITY DEPARTMENT, carefully lettered in red ink for this occasion.

This Subha—whatever that meant—bowed again and his breath came steaming through his moustache.

“Sssso sssssorry,” he sizzled. We never learned why he prefaced and concluded almost every statement with these strange words, unless it was that he was determined to oppose almost anything we wanted to do and so surrounded his veto with apologies.

As he had been in India and had some acquaintance with Europeans we felt he might understand our needs. Primary among them, of course, was to learn what great festivals, what large concourses of people, we might film. What ceremonies might we foreigners visit? What might we find here that was indigenous and exclusive to Nepal? When were the usual pilgrimages from India and Tibet? When were the festivals of which we had heard, the Machendrajatra and the Dasehra with their travelling shrines and sacrifices, the Kaka Boli and Swana Boli devoted to the crow and the dog? What did the Subha suggest we should bring to the outer world from the beauty and wisdom of Nepal? When could we have an audience with the Maharajah?

Ah, he was so sorry, but all the festivals occurred at some other time. There was nothing now. Anyway, the Machendrajatra was just a party for the poor and ignorant people; the Dasehra—pooh!—was only for the soldiers. The very

next festival would be what he termed the Ascension of the Maharajah, meaning the anniversary of his accession to power.

That was the keynote of all his information. He, as the Maharajah's personal representative, must at the same time exalt his master and persuade us that Nepal was not different from other countries, that it was modern, progressive, mechanized, for he knew that whatever we as writers and photographers thought picturesque in the country or exotically exciting would probably be a deplorable survival from ancient times. He and his Maharajah were ashamed of those very customs which we had travelled so many thousands of miles to record, excellent customs, many of them, which our grey modern world could well afford to emulate. We were convinced that the colour and active beauty of the East would be tonic to our own people. We believed sincerely that escape by way of films or written tales to a world more glamorous than ours and in many ways kindlier was salutary in itself, aside from being sociologically instructive. The horrors of the East must be noted as well as its blessings, in all honesty, and therefore we asked again of the Dasehra festival.

Leila had offered the Subha a cup of our tea, but he had sizzlingly refused: "Sssso sssssorry." A Brahman such as he would be corrupted by eating with us. When this tactical gesture failed us Armand came to the point at once.

"Now listen. Because it is important in your culture, as it is in that of India, we are also interested in the worship of Kali, Durga, Bhairavi, your goddesses of death, and we were told at Bhimphedi that the Dasehra festival should occur while we are here. We were told that thousands of buffalo are sacrificed to Durga at that time, and that their meat is given to the poor—a very excellent idea," said Armand, holding his glasses to the sun and wiping them earnestly, a job which Leila usually attended to, for he never seemed to care whether they were clean or not so long as he could see through them

at all. "This wonderful festival," said he, putting the glasses on again and trying not to look fascinated by the Subha's own spectacles which were continually see-sawing up on one side when his moustache on that side see-sawed down, "this festival should be preserved on film for posterity, don't you think, because even now it has been reduced to scarcely more than a soldiers' rite. Pooh!" said Armand.

I marvelled at the several changes of diplomatic front which he had accomplished in a single paragraph, but the Subha was unimpressed by any of them. He just didn't reply, except to maintain that he was so sorry.

Roy choked over his cup. "Tea leaf," he exclaimed, and hid his face in the cup again.

"Now look, Subha," I said gently, "you can at least tell us about this, or these. When do we get our equipment that came over the cableway? All our clothes are packed with it, you know. And when can we pay our respects to the Maharajah?"

He was looking hard at one of the Fatti biscuits which his religion forbade him to eat in our company. I pushed it towards him with an aseptic knife and he pocketed it, beaming.

"Highness," he said, and the spectacles and moustaches jiggled like an Alexander Calder wire sculpture all over his face, "Highness sssso busy now. Eggwipment coming soon." He bowed and backed out of the door, down the garden path and out the gate.

That again was that. We were being put in our places. Highness, as the Subha called him, who had invited us to Nepal in the name of his daughter and Leila's cousin, Franklin Roosevelt, would have us know who was master here; nary a thing would we see or do without his authorization via that ferret of a Subha.

"I suppose we can walk around anyway," Leila said. But if it had not been that Armand towered grimly over the muzzle of the gun on the shoulder of the soldier who guarded our

gate, shrinking him even further with a look, we probably would have remained prisoners in the compound all day.

With that step through the wall we reached Khatmandu and a world of fantasy such as even my childhood dreams had not enjoyed. It began with the miracle of telephone wires in that lost valley and it ended with blood for the gods. In between was a mincemeat of wonders, of shrines and temples and palaces, of humble dwellings so exquisitely proportioned and splendidly carved that our cities seemed, for a moment, impossible to live in again. In Khatmandu, as throughout Nepal, there are actually more shrines and temples than houses, for it is believed that life in this world is only transitory and the world itself but a sort of tourist camp where man rests awhile before attaining a permanent Hereafter. It is therefore of greater importance to build for the gods than for himself; in a climate as equable as that of the valley there is little need anyway for elaborate dwellings, unless, of course, you are a Brahman of the royal family, semi-godly in consequence, and so must build temples unto yourself.

All the handsome houses, crumbling now, were the work of Newar architects, a race like the Balinese of to-day which was on the whole so artistic that the cobbler, the tinker, the elephant mahout could all claim credit for a design here and there or a corner of carving on their neighbours' homes. But when the Gurkhas, a warrior tribe, subjugated the Newars, art perished as it has in every other land during periods of war. Elsewhere it has had the latent vitality to revive when peace returned, but not in Nepal. The rule of the Gurkhas continues; there is no new art; Khatmandu and its envioning cities, Bhatgaon and Patan, seem to me the most beautiful in the world, but their beauty is a relic of long ago.

We had seen the same tragedy in Burma, where Pagan of the five thousand temples had been razed by the hordes of Kublai Khan; we had seen it in northern India where the rabid Mohammedans had imposed the epicene art of Allah

upon the beauty which Brahmanism and Buddhism had both inspired. And we would see within a year the ancient loveliness of Holland and France despoiled by modern Huns.

Unquestionably the Gurkha's military administration of Nepal has done more for the country, economically, than the blithe rule of the Newars ever envisioned, but the sacrifice has been too great. I cannot believe that the Newars, though they have become shopkeepers now, would ever have imported that most hideous of modern machines, the black umbrella, which has spread like a pox across Khatmandu. This may be wishful thinking, but I am inclined to think it is ethnologically important that most of the umbrellas, according to my most careful research, were carried by the Gurkha men. And I cannot believe that the Newar kings would build palaces like Metro-Goldwyn lavatories.

Their shops were shabby now, but glowing with corn and peppers and cabbages so green that I half wondered if they had not already been cooked for just seven minutes with a pinch of baking soda. Pyramids of brass pots seemed to light the depths of these cavernous cubicles. Block-printed materials of homespun were draped at the entrance over carved dragons. There were graduated jars for oil lamps, the smallest the size of your ear and the largest as big as a Stetson hat, arranged in proper rows beneath pendant hank of red yarn wound with gold thread for braiding into the hair.

Everywhere were the eyes of Nepal, Buddha's eyes, painted on the shop fronts to watch for marauders, carved in the flagstones of the street. The swarming crowds of market-goers took good care not to step on these; they eddied around them, and on none did I see a single splotch of the betel nut spit which made a maculate red horror of the paving elsewhere; and strangely enough the hundreds of sacred cattle, though they were of the Hindu persuasion, never micturated in Buddha's eye.

Armand made his way through the crowd to me, and said

quietly, "Buddha isn't the only one who is keeping his eye on us, and I don't mean these people either. Turn slowly, then take a quick look down the alley to your right. Heh? Isn't that he?"

It was. It was Hospitality, half concealed behind an orange idol of Ganesh, the elephant god. He was busily writing in a notebook.

"This is going to be just dandy," Armand muttered, "if every move we make is spied upon. Maybe it's only coincidence, but I doubt it. Let's see if we can throw him off the track."

But in a moment we saw the utter impossibility of this, for where we went the crowd went, dozens of them that soon grew to hundreds milling about to view the odd creatures which the Maharajah had flung in their midst. The movement of the crowd was our movement, plain to see several blocks away, and easily apparent even above the heads of the Nepalese were Armand's high head and shoulders. It was impossible to conceal him.

"See if he's still after us," Leila asked him. Like a lighthouse beacon he turned his head above the mob.

"He's there all right."

We slid through a slot of an alley, greased by the bodies surrounding us. On one side were trestles supporting skeins of yarn a hundred feet long. Two old women with gold earrings the size and shape of highball glass coasters were reeling the yarn, but they stopped in such amazement that they could make no objection when the crowd became entangled in their yarn and overturned their trestles.

Through this alley we reached eventually the Durbar Square of which rumour and the few odd books on Nepal had reported such wonderful tales. It was a medley of colour, a riot of Oriental architecture, of pagoda roofs rising tier upon tier, of giant stone staircases which not even Armand could climb, even if he were permitted on them. The square itself

is small with many streets radiating from it to the other *tols* or squares which are found shadowed by temples in every part of this labyrinthine city. Opposite us was the Taleju temple, dedicated to Tulaja Devi, the protectress of the Maharajah's house. Legend has it that Prithwi Narayan, the Gurkha conqueror of Khatmandu, once offered a human sacrifice in this temple, and was that same night visited in a dream by Tulaja Devi who expressed to him her disapproval. And in the morning he was visited by ravening hordes of lice, which so clinched the matter that he never offered human sacrifice again.

The Hanuman Dhoka, the gate of the monkey god, came into view as I turned a corner round a portly Nepalese who seemed to be trying to examine my teeth. The great god Hanuman sat beside it upon a pedestal, swathed in dirty linen and further protected from the sun by a parasol that was stuck into the back of his neck. His face was scarcely recognizable, it was so smeared with vermilion and *ghee*, the native buffalo butter; it was simply a red blob, inexpressibly evil by the very fact that it was featureless. Two lions, laughing, guarded him and his golden gate.

Beauty and horror were jumbled together everywhere. The serene face of Buddha would be flanked by leering griffins; the exquisite door to a temple of Kali would have oozing from beneath it the blood of the goat we had heard bleating a few minutes ago.

Someone spoke at the back of the crowd and a word was carried along from mouth to mouth. I turned to see Hospitality leaning over a balcony with his eyes glued upon us and his fingers scribbling in the notebook. "The suspect characters," he was probably writing, "have examined the Hanuman Dhoka and seemed excited to see the blood of one of our sacrificial goats flowing from the temple yard. Very odd." My portly dentist repeated the word that had been passed to him and unsuccessfully tried to block Armand's way as we

headed for a huge edifice in the centre of the square. Jack walked quickly by him and over his bare toes. The rest of us followed, keeping Leila in our midst, to her obvious annoyance.

There stood the most monstrous and hideous image that the fearful mind of man could conceive, the idol Khal Bhairab, goddess of terror and death. Forty feet high stood this appalling creature of red and black and orange masonry, clutching her breasts with two hands, waving a spear and a fire-brand with two others and trampling upon the head of a very contented-looking demon. Across her forehead was strung a row of human skulls, and great pendants of them encircled her neck and her protuberant paunch. She leered at me; I could move nowhere in the square before her without her lewd and terrible eyes pursuing me. I reflected upon my past with some discomfort; there had been a few indiscretions, surely. These eyes told me that Khal Bhairab would bide her time for me, but she would get me yet. I felt already like a munched-on mangó stone before that retributive scrutiny, and I could understand for the first time the very real awesomeness of graven images.

I unslung the cameras, the Leica with colour film and the Ikonta with black and white. Shooting over the head of the portly man, who was obstructed by the crowd around him, I turned my own mechanical evil eyes upon Khal Bhairab. A ghostly voice at my back whispered, "I saw her blink . . ." That would be Leila, of course; but the devil of it was that I too had seemed to see the flicker of a colossal eyelid in my view-finder.

It was no longer difficult to believe the reports of British officials who had been Government Residents at Khatmandu, horribly preposterous as they at first had seemed. I could well believe that during the great Dasehra festival and at various other religious orgies the feet of ghoulish goddesses were awash with blood. I could believe, and I was later to

confirm, the story of thousands of buffalo sacrificially decapitated, within a period of two or three days only, of little Gurkhas whisking off the heads of the beasts with a single slash of the *khukri* until the earth became a lake of living blood. Preposterous? Yes, but it was true, as so much that is true of Nepal must seem preposterous to the outside world, though it is now as embarrassing for me to write of these things as it once was to write of the supernatural in the South Pacific Islands, for the armchair explorer may doubt my integrity whereas I have only a handful of reputable folk, our own expedition and the few living men who have been to Nepal, to back me up. It must be remembered that the wonders an author conjures for you by your own hearthside may be weed-common facts in lands that have not yet outgrown them in progressing towards the weed-common wonders of radio and sulphanilamide. Ghosts you may legitimately doubt, but the old-timer in the South Seas will uphold any conscientious author who tells of apparitions—supernatural or scientifically unrecognized—which have confronted him by night and by day.

The testimony of our own eyes, indeed, was strained in that Durbar of Khatmandu—and we were accustomed to wonders; we had been chosen for this expedition, I dare say, because by previous travel in strange lands we had gradually become inoculated against wonder; we were not likely to romanticize and produce a Hollywood fiction of the facts which Armand had laboriously hunted in the remote corners of the world. Even I, a novelist, whose profession is lies, was unlikely to report in the chronicle of such an expedition as ours that the temple towards which the crowd now squeezed us, like toothpaste from a tube, was other than it was, and will be until the stern Gurkha administration will have functionalized all art in Nepal.

It was a Tantric temple, the abode of a cult which has spread secretly through India and Nepal, a cult of ardent

but obscene worship, as the temple itself proclaimed by its architecture when the sun struck the niches of it and fingered its elaborate designs. Not only was it carved splendidly from pediment to roof, but it was entirely coloured with the strong, primary paints of Nepal, and these were laid on in the cartographers' manner so that each colour was distinct from the next, no greens together, nor reds nor yellows, but the red hips of the goddess on a roof prop contrasted nicely with the green shoulders of the godly lover who was executing his stupendous love. Graceful, smiling and multi-armed ladies were the caryatides of this roof, and beneath their feet were scenes in bas-relief of such wondrous manners of love as ten "Karma Sutra" poets never dreamed. Congeries of men and women writhed together in amorous ecstasy. Beasts and men, and beasts and women, all of them laughing, performed romantic gymnastics for the delight of the Tantric alumnus.

This was the way of life, he would maintain to you; life was procreation; procreation was sex; therefore every manifestation of sexual energy was good as the method of the body to permit the soul, through continuous reincarnations, to work out its "Karma." The erotic gesture of whatever sort represented the urge to live and was therefore sacred. That is the cycle of Hindu logic, which is just about as reasonable as the theory that temple prostitutes must exist to purge a man of worldly desire before he goes in to worship. It was all a headache to my New England conscience, but I could not deny that the obscene carvings were excellent as pure design.

I trained the colour camera upon them, with the long telephoto lens, for they too were important as an integral part of the culture of Nepal. To the pure . . . I was thinking. But when I had made my exposures I turned to see Hospitality diligently scribbling in his little book of revelations. So the sahibs were ignorant of love, were they? That would be a choice discovery for him to take back to his Maharajah. These paleskins had indeed the look of being immaculately conceived.

25 Outpost of Empire

WE WAITED. EACH morning we waited for Hospitality to bring us word that His Highness would receive us at last. The five of us would sit staring at that atrocious rug, wondering how the devil we ever would get a film if we never could get the express permission of the Maharajah to begin working.

"If something doesn't happen," Armand growled, "in the next couple of days, we'd better simply pack up and leave. What have we seen so far? Scenery. Magnificent scenery. Architecture. Idols. We're supposed to be making a *moving* picture, aren't we? Dammit!"

Leila, to avoid looking at the rug, was sewing on a pair of pants for the gardener's little boy. "It's just not the season, as Hospitality says. No pilgrimages, no festivals, nothing. Have we been any place yet where it *was* the right season?"

I remembered a day in France when I tried to buy dried prunes at a village store. "*Ah, mais ce n'est pas la saison, m'sieur!*" the impatient proprietress had told me.

"I'm beginning to believe that Indian Asia is exhausted of film material," said Armand gloomily. "Perhaps we should pull stakes and go back to Africa. We could do another 'Dark Rapture' in the time we have left. Here's Hospitality. Well?"

Hospitality bowed and scraped, wiggled his moustaches and his glasses in what was meant to be an ingratiating smile, shook hands with each of us.

"I am sssso sssssorry," he said. "Your baggage has arrived. Highness cannot see you to-day. He has pressure. Sssso . . ." He stopped there at the glitter in Armand's eye. He backed through the door, just about in time.

He had scarcely gone when there was a commotion in the street beyond our garden wall, and when we reached the yard we saw at last the Maharajah, though he intently did not see

us at all. Beyond the wall passed the head and shoulders of one of the royal elephants, and sedately perched upon it, looking straight ahead, was the Maharajah, "Highness" himself, looking like anyone's grandfather in his perfectly tailored European clothes. He rode with portly dignity behind the original of Hospitality's moustache. I had somehow expected that he would be darker of skin than he was; there was neither the chocolate warmth to it of the Hindu complexion, nor the yellow of the Mongol. The Maharajah, like most of his family, was nearly of our own colouring.

"I think," said Leila cryptically, as this lordly and disdainful figure passed from view, "we had better eat the gold leaf."

I had forgotten the gold leaf and the regal brew of it we were to make, but now there seemed no doubt that Armand's original contention was right; gold leaf in vodka would be no present for a Maharajah such as this. There was no doubt either that we all could stand a snack of gold leaf, if it were as fortifying as that amazing old apothecary claimed it to be.

The Maharajah passed from view, and we returned to our contemplations.

Armand had written immediately upon our arrival to the one white man, the British Resident, who was allowed to reside with his staff in Khatmandu. He had asked him for tea and cocktails with us. His note in reply seemed rather odd: "Sorry. Can't manage that. Come for dinner with me and I'll explain."

We went in the evening to visit the loneliest man in the world, Colonel Rand, as I may well call him, and his charming wife. Their Residency was indeed an "outpost of Empire," a beamed and bricked and ivied English country house in a land which owed no allegiance to England and wanted none. As we entered the living room Mrs. Rand rose from a table by a window where the great Himalayas were framed, a vivid and vital woman smiling at us with a welcome which could not have been more eager had we been her own family returning.

In her hand she held the last piece of the immense picture puzzle which covered the card table. Outside were the Himalayas, majestic, terrible, and here on her table, composed of a thousand tiny pieces, was the rural scene from her own land which she had laboriously assembled.

"It passes the time," she said. Yes, it passed the time, but not quickly enough. She and her husband had been here three years already, completely isolated from their own kind and they would be here two years more before they could go on leave. Colonel Rand, military in bearing, with tense yet tender eyes, asked us what we would have to drink. As he crossed the room he put the last piece of the picture puzzle into place.

"We get them large, so they will last," he said. "You know, at a post like this, although it is in many ways fascinating, there now and again comes a moment when you are inclined to believe in the Hindu notion of a perpetual flow of time, of life merging into life through various incarnations. If it weren't for Dorothy's reassurance I couldn't say for certain how long I have been here, or whether I'm the same man who came out long ago. This may be a middle avatar, and I shall be here as man or cow or cockroach until the end of the world. We must listen to the news later on."

I thought of the various consuls and official residents I had met in out-of-the-way places, in Tahiti, Fiji, Borneo, Algeria. Colonel Rand's task was surely the loneliest of them all.

"I'll tell you with no false modesty that it's a delicate job," he was saying. "The Maharajah runs all of Nepal like a private estate, feudally, and a Resident is here on sufferance only. Believe me or not, I actually am forbidden to visit the very few foreigners who come to this country; they, like yourselves, must come to me here, but only after I have received permission from His Highness to receive them. I've never learned why, but that's the edict and I stick to it. Believe me or not again, I have never been more than twelve miles in any direction from this Residency. It's just not permitted."

"Good Heavens, why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He was the perfect representative of the British Empire, capable, courageous, loyal not only to his own land, but, in so far as possible, to his adopted one. There were matters here, he implied, which it wouldn't be cricket to discuss.

He changed the subject tactfully when he saw Armand, tactfully also, examining a row of portraits of the various Maharajahs who had literally owned and operated Nepal since the year 1846, when that most brilliant ruler, Jang Bahadur, put an end to the warring factions and consolidated the country.

"You know, of course, that there is a King of Nepal as well as the Maharajah, and that the Maharajah is properly the Prime Minister. The King, whose real title is Maharaj Adhiraj, is as much a puppet as the King of Italy, while the Prime Minister, or Maharajah, has almost autocratic powers. The entire national revenue passes through his hands. There is no doubt that he is one of the wealthiest men in the world, and perhaps one of the wisest, to maintain his kingdom inviolate from foreign influence. Yet he is making every effort to industrialize the country. The exports increase yearly. The imports, unfortunately, are ninety-five per cent Japanese and ninety per cent valueless. Just last week one of my houseboys bought a Japanese bicycle for the pleasant sum of one pound, and when he rode it in front of the house to show me it suddenly buckled in a dozen places like something made of spaghetti. He has it splinted with bamboo now."

One of the bearded buccaneers who passed for houseboys announced in Hindustani that dinner was served. Appareled in white jacket and scarlet turban with the Nepalese coat-of-arms upon it, I might easily have taken him for a lesser, an evil prince.

It would be but a simple family dinner, said Mrs. Rand; she hadn't known we were in Nepal. But tall candles illumined it;

the linen was glossy and good to touch ; the wine was the best of France, a rare Pouilly ; and the steak ! Ah, but that steak was good after our forced diet upon the cellulose chicken of the country ! After the rice and the rice and the rice ! And the gobs of tobacco-flecked molten chocolate which we carried in our pockets for quick lunches during the hot weather, and the grey and concrete chocolate which had to stay us in the mountains when rain and cold and coming night made it impracticable for us to stop for better meals.

I beamed at the Rands in their snug lost world. We all beamed like cretins, while the Colonel, slowly revolving his wine glass, told us something of the odd history of Nepal.

"The prehistoric legends you can skip," he said. "They are full of gods and sacred serpents and kings descended from one or the other or both, the usual *mélange* you find in the work of all Oriental historians who seek a divine ancestry and embellish it with heroic fiction. The first recorded incident of any importance was the visit of Buddha around 450 B.C. He was born on the edge of Nepal, you know, and when he visited the valley to make a tour of the many great Hindu shrines he won over a thousand proselytes to his own new religion, weaning them from Hinduism as shrewdly as one political party leader seduces disciples from the opposition.

"Then around 250 B.C. there came Asoka, Emperor of northern India, ostensibly on a Buddhist pilgrimage, for he was a most pious fellow. He erected monuments which are still standing in various parts of the valley, married off his daughter to a Nepalese aristocrat and deftly sneaked the throne from beneath the corpulent body of a king whose marvellous name was Stunko.

"The history of the next eight centuries is vague. We know that various princes of India extended their conquests in Nepal, but at what periods and to what extent we are not very clear. We have the record, however, of that amazing Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, who somehow got to Nepal about

A.D. 637, stating that the Hindus were in full possession at that time. Wait, I'll read you what your ancient colleague in exploration has to say."

Colonel Rand excused himself and shortly returned to the table with a large brown morocco volume under his arm. "Forgive me, Dorothy. Bad manners, I know." His wife smiled at Leila, sharing the strange knowledge that men just never would grow up.

" 'The Kingdom of Nepal,' he writes, and this is thirteen centuries ago, mind you, 'is in the middle of snowy mountains. Its soil abounds in fruit and flowers and the climate is cold. The inhabitants are of a hard nature, and neither good faith nor justice appeals to them, but they are gifted with a very considerable skill in the arts. . . . The houses are of wood, painted and sculptured; the people are fond of bathing, of dramatic representations of astrology, and bloody sacrifices. . . . Irrigation—practically and scientifically applied—makes the soil of great value. Buddhism and Brahmanism flourish in the principal temples, which are wealthy and well supported. Numerous monasteries shelter the Buddhist priests. Commerce prospers, and trade is well organized and directed.'

"Pretty sharp old fellow, wasn't he? There's a biography someone should write. Imagine him, at that period, crossing China, crossing the wild plateaux of Tibet, and then, by Judas!—I beg your pardon—trekking over the Kuti Pass of the Himalayas, twenty thousand feet up, and down into this completely unknown land! Why, he makes Marco Polo look like a Sunday excursionist! And remember that Hiuen Tsang, in the year 637, didn't have half the modern travel conveniences of Marco, six hundred years later!"

We laughed. We were pretty soft adventurers compared with those of a millennium and more ago.

"Well, there next came a period when Nepal declined to scarcely more than a vassal state of Tibet, when Srong Btsan Sgam Po, the Tibetan Emperor, became so powerful that Amsu

Varman, King of Nepal, dared not refuse his request for a princess in marriage. It was the influence of this remarkable woman, whose name, I believe, was Bri Btsun, that elevated Tibet culturally as her husband was martially doing, for she brought with her an urn which belonged to Buddha, promulgated Buddhism throughout the country and transplanted the infinitely superior Nepalese art with such zeal that even the art of China was profoundly affected. The arch in the Nan-kau Pass near Peking, with its Garudas, Nagas, and Makaras, obviously of Hindu origin and Nepalese in design, is a case in point.

"Now there was another period of about six hundred years when the Thakurs and the Mallas, the 'wrestler kings,' alternately devastated and reorganized the country, until the almost omnipotent Prithwi Narayan, King of the Gurkha tribes, commenced the terrible four years' war which resulted in complete subjugation of Nepal. It has remained under Gurkha dominion ever since. You have heard of Kirtipur, the City of Cut Noses? It was during that campaign that the beleaguered people first asked aid from the British, and as there was considerable trade at the time between Nepal and India, or enough to seem worth while retaining, the British Government sent a small force under Captain Kinloch. But it was the rainy season, the streams were swollen, malaria took a frightful toll of his men, and the Captain decided finally to retire while he could before he should be shut off from his provisions. It wasn't a very doughty achievement for the British Army, I should say."

The Colonel looked extremely pained, but the arrival of a Camembert, *bien mou* (a cheese I had sought vainly in the East), restored him. I am afraid I slavered.

"Nor did our next expeditions to Nepal do anything to elevate our prestige. In 1792 we made a commercial treaty with the King. In 1814 we declared war upon the Nepalese because for some years they had been seizing villages which

encroached upon our Indian frontier ; they had seized territory in Ramnagar and murdered the police of Batoli. One after another, Generals Gillespie, Martindell, Wood, and Marley led forces of picked men through the Terai and over the mountains, fighting constantly against forces of tiny Gurkhas which in no case amounted to a quarter their number. Yet in hand-to-hand fighting the Gurkhas won almost every battle in the mountains. 'A British soldier may be big indeed,' wrote General Gillespie, 'but he cannot do battle with a single fast mosquito in the dark.'

"It was quite true. In one instance Lieutenant Young with a force of two thousand was easily defeated by two hundred Gurkhas under the command of Ranjit Sing. Shameful ! They were scattered all over the hillside, little bits of them, sliced like sausage by the Gurkha knives. After two years of fighting General Ochterlony finally out-manœuvred the by now exhausted Nepalese. The Treaty of Segowli was signed and a British Resident sent to Khatmandu. -

"After this there was a period of petticoat rule in Nepal, of imbecile sovereigns and wholesale murder, and when a general massacre of thirty-one of the most influential chiefs occurred there rose straightaway to the post of Prime Minister that amazing soldier, Jang Bahadur. He became the actual ruler of the country ; the King was exiled. He tried once to regain the throne, was defeated, and ended his days chained in a pit at Bhatgaon. From that time to this Nepal has been ruled by Prime Ministers, descendants of Jang Bahadur. The law of succession is curious ; the office always falls to the eldest surviving male relative, son, brother, or first cousin. There is a king, as I have said, but he is a figurehead only."

Leila gave a swirl to her brandy. "Weren't the Nepalese engaged in the World War ?"

"Indeed they were. During the first year of the war the Maharajah offered aid to England, a splendid gesture of friendship since he was under no obligation whatsoever to do so, nor

did he need to curry favour with us at that time. Between 1914 and 1918 he contributed over a million rupees and vast quantities of materials : cardamons, tea, clothing, *sal* wood. And two hundred thousand Gurkhas, approximately one-quarter of the male population of Nepal, joined our service, some on the Northwest Frontier, some in the United Provinces, and quite a number on the Western Front. They fought superbly, those little men, not so much with the gun as with the terrible *khukri*. I've seen a Hun split open from scalp to pelvis by a five-foot Gurkha with a two-foot blade."

Mrs. Rand tentatively pushed back her chair. The Colonel smiled. Yes, he was through with dinner and the story of Nepal. Mrs. Rand and Leila retired from the dining-room according to the old English custom of leaving the men alone for a few minutes after the meal. Our host passed the brandy again and I furtively helped myself, feeling as I always did at such a moment that the ladies had left us so that we men might without embarrassment indulge in what was not quite proper. I always wondered if perhaps I should break out with some slightly ribald story, unsuited to ladies' ears, or ignite a foul, masculine cheroot.

The evening passed delightfully. We wallowed in comfort and hung upon the words of these intelligent and gracious people. It is to them that I largely owe whatever information I here set down regarding the world's least publicized land, Nepal. To them and to the young man, Thapa, whom we had met on the toy railway crossing the Terai and were soon to meet again.

The Rands wished us good night upon the broad stone steps of the Residency. There was a car in the drive, an ancient vehicle, a Dodge, which looked slightly familiar.

"Why, that's the car," Armand exclaimed, "that we saw being carried over the mountains!"

"Certainly it is," the Colonel replied. "It is at your disposal. His Highness's secretary 'phoned half an hour ago,

saying something to the effect that since you thought so highly of it as to photograph it at length, perhaps you would enjoy using it while you are in the valley. It is to be a gift to His Highness's niece, a girl about fifteen years old who is just learning to drive and has already cracked up three good cars. So her wise uncle has imported this antique for her. It is yours, however," he said with a crooked smile, "until His Highness decides that you are to leave."

We were doubly surprised when upon climbing into the car our chauffeur grinned at us. It was Thapa, the pessimistic youth we had met on the train. He had disheartened us then, but soon we were to find him invaluable, for he had considerable intelligence, a fair knowledge of English, and a very sensible aversion to our warder, Hospitality.

In that mile from the Residency to the resthouse our car was stopped six times by armed guards who would emerge suddenly from their little kiosks, shove their rifles menacingly at our radiator and demand to see Thapa's pass. There is a curfew in Khatmandu at eleven o'clock, and none may be out at that hour without a special permit. The guards were everywhere, in the obscurest lanes, in the bazaars, disconcertingly before our own house, but what they were on guard against I never could learn. Nepal had been at peace with itself for many years; invasion was almost impossible as the British learned during their several campaigns; yet here was a standing army of forty-five thousand troops, regularly drilling, continually watchful by night and day. The army, it seemed, now served little purpose except as the hobby of the Maharajah, a vastly expensive one which left insufficient funds for other and more essential services of the state.

We reached the resthouse at midnight and the guard passed us grudgingly. Thapa bowed low.

"Good morrow," he said.

26 Bhatgaon the Golden

DAY AFTER DAY slid down the glacial mountains on the east of the valley and up the mountains of the west. The sun blessed us. Here was the fullest peace, so much of it indeed that we were not once disturbed by an invitation to visit His Highness, the Maharajah. He sent us, with never a message, great salvers of fruit and vegetables, haunches of venison which he himself had shot, said Hospitality, and on one occasion six dozen eggs. These eggs passed the entire morning for Chand, our warrior cook. For hours he sat breaking them into a little bowl, grunting at each and spitting on each and finally flinging it over his shoulder to the mongoose which, when it could no longer swallow, delighted in smearing the yokes on the outside of his muzzle as if somehow he might absorb them through his skin. Egg after egg went sailing, until Leila came, horrified, into the yard.

"Maharajah eggs all bad!" said Chand. Zoom, went another one.

We appreciated the thoughtfulness of the Maharajah, particularly regarding the venison which was the only good meat, excepting Colonel Rand's steak, we had eaten in a very long time. But if His Highness was shooting deer these days he was certainly not tending to business so strictly that he could find no time for us. We decided to start filming anyway, to get what we could of background shots so long as we were not explicitly forbidden to do so. Let Hospitality, that Winchell in Wonderland, write us up in his scandal book; let Thapa groan at the thought of the punishments that would afflict us all, we none the less had a film to make, a perfectly respectable and serious record of Nepal. On our own heads be it.

So Thapa groaned across the wheel of the ancient Dodge with Jack beside him anti-phonally chanting "Home on the Range." In the back squeezed Armand, Leila, Roy, Hos-

pitality, and I plus the most essential assortment of moving picture apparatus. We toured, breathless; there was scant room for breath on that condensed expedition.

We crossed a modern steel bridge on the sacred Baghmatti River, and gulped—there was only room for half a gulp—at the sight of a bloated white corpse floating past. A hundred crows were fighting to ride and swill upon it. They would cling to the blisters left by the inadequate cremation fire and plunge their beaks out of sight into the flesh. The corpse would spin over; they would go down fighting for their victuals. But the soul of that corpse didn't mind, for it was at peace and purified by these sweet waters. Under the bridge it went, the modern and civilized bridge, away and away till there was no body left but only a skeleton that sank slowly, a symbol of the horror and the really admirable faith of the East.

Ahead of us lay the *maidan*, the immense parade ground, with a thousand troops vigorously drilling. They were smart little fellows in their natty brown uniforms and jaunty cloth hats; the Gurkha, I thought, has the qualities of the mongoose; he is as quick, as spontaneously friendly, as deadly as that small prince of civets, and I could see why it was recounted that he left a swathe of broken hearts when he went to the service of India. The greatest lovers, they were reputed to be, as well as the greatest fighting men in Asia.

I was thinking it was my turn to draw a breath now, as I had plainly seen Armand draw his; I had felt him inflate at the other side of the car. I was just preparing for this feast of air when an explosion like the collision of planets rocked the Dodge.

"High noon," said Thapa.

"Maharajah boom," said Hospitality, not to be outdone. It was twelve o'clock all right; we should never be doubtful of it again with that cannon-clock of the Maharajah booming to all the valley that even time was under his omnipotent control.

We drove slowly around the *maidan*, admiring the accoutrements of the Nepalese officers. They were dressed in scarlet and sat upon tiger skins, and from their helmets waved Bird of Paradise feathers which had been brought from Borneo three thousand miles away. Whenever they paused to review the troops a corps of coolies rushed forward with whisks, and squatted to swish the flies from their horses' bellies.

All major-generals in Nepal—and there are many of them—said Thapa, are legitimate sons of the Maharajah, but all illegitimate sons are lieutenant-colonels.

Beyond the *maidan* stood the palaces of these sons and grandsons, square white edifices of marble, utterly unsplendid. And beyond these was the Singa Durbar, the palace of the Maharajah, impressive by its size alone rather than any architectural beauty. A high iron fence surrounded its gardens and ponds and fountains. The palace, white and supine, lay across the centre of the twenty-acre space; to the right were infinite stables and to the left the private zoo in which were housed whatever animals of the chase His Highness had wounded and not killed. There, said Hospitality, lived the Royal Rhinoceros which must be killed at the exact moment of the Maharajah's death.

That seemed to be rubbing it in a bit, I thought, considering that the Maharajah had reputedly killed forty-seven rhino (and one hundred and thirty-five tiger) during a three months' hunt last year.

We turned from these monuments to massacre and drove west, over undulating fields of corn, to the small village of Thini. There was only a single street of it, running up and over a hill, walled on both sides by two- and three-storey houses of the lovely old Newar form: low eaves, long struts of symbolic carving, latticed windows of perfect proportion, unlike any others in the world. The usual bright brass pots shone in the shops beneath them, and loops of material block-printed black or red in a great variety of patterns.

Roy, Jack, and I debarked to get a shot of Armand and Leila riding up the street in the ancient Dodge, but at that moment it began to drizzle. Roy waved a handkerchief to Thapa to signify that the camera was ready. I crouched beneath his tripod with the Ikonta suspended by its strap from my teeth while with one hand I held up the light meter and with the other threatened Hell to the curious crowd that clogged our scene. It rained, and up went a hundred umbrellas, obliterating what little light was left, adding another darkness to our patient film.

It was not polite, of course, as their guests, to yawp at them, but yawp we did, even Hospitality with an apologetic and decently Brahman yawp. It did no good. They began to imitate us. More and more umbrellas went up until I, who can face a cobra at a fair distance and am terrified of female umbrellas in New York, fumbled for the kazoo and jumped away tootling "The Jolly Old King of England" upon it. I blew and blew, and the umbrellas surged after me. I yawped into the kazoo, for you play it that way, and the crowd left the cameras to follow the madman down the long Thini street. It was a ruse we should employ often thereafter.

Again we were jammed breathless into the car and driving through sun again. Markets appeared in the most unlikely places, in the midst of an open field where old men sat cross-legged selling red onions beneath oiled-paper parasols painted with dragons. Holy yogis limped slowly down the road, raising twisted fingers as we jolted past them. They were begging, said Hospitality, who was still trying to out-smart Thapa, for "rice, *pice* or anything nice." If these were fair samples of the Yoga philosophy which so excited idle matrons in New York, our culture seemed in a bad way, indeed.

We circled Khatmandu by an abominable road. We were going to Bhatgaon, said Hospitality, Bhatgaon the Golden City that had fired my young imagination when I had first read Father Giuseppe's *Researches*. My heart beat faster, for great

dreams too rarely come true, but it fails me now in seeking to describe that strangest and loveliest city in the world.

You come upon it gradually, through a scattering of houses of the Newar type, past the huge tank called Siddha Pokri, three hundred yards long and one hundred wide, which was built in the seventeenth century during the reign of Bhim Sen and stocked by him with goldfish imported from China across Tibet and the four-mile-high passes of the Himalayas—the hardest fish in the world, they must be, to endure such a journey, or the torture and humiliation inflicted upon them by maiden aunts with stagnant water and tiny bowls.

The people of Bhatgaon believe their city to resemble the conch shell of Vishnu Narayan, the rounded and broader end lying towards the north-east and its point south-west. It is smaller than the other two cities of the vale, Khatmandu and Patan, but its streets are wider and cleaner and its building far better preserved, for at the time of the Gurkha conquest Bhatgaon was surrendered without resistance to Prithwi Narayan and consequently escaped the plunder which those other cities experienced at the hands of the invaders.

You pass the tank, and the streets dwindle for a while before you, funnelling towards the Durbar Square. Balconies of superb grill-work carve the sunlight into kaleidoscopic patterns where it strikes the flagstone streets. Lattice windows wearing carved peacocks flank you to right and to left. You pass through wooden colonnades, rich red in tone, through carved gateways with the stylized phallic emblems of Siva upon their tops. Griffins of green stone drowse before many doorways, and above them, one on each side to warn off marauders, are painted the eyes of Buddha, the vigilant eyes of Nepal.

Bhatgaon's Durbar Square seems an architectural bedlam when suddenly you emerge from the half-shadowed streets and are confronted by it, a hundred gilded roofs, tier upon tier, flinging spots of sun like golden coins at your eyes, a score of

temples so closely packed that it is hard to tell the limits of the square. Somewhere near the centre on a twenty-foot cube of stone is a stupendous bell, suspended between granite columns from a granite beam, and overlooking this, on a great pillar surmounted by a lotus of stone, sits the magnificent figure of Rajah Bhupatindra Mall, the greatest of Bhatgaon's rulers two hundred years ago.

Serene and arrogant, clothed entirely in gold plate, Bhupatindra Mall looks over the finest building of his reign, the Durbar Hall with its gilt-copper door. It is intricately embossed with a myriad designs from both Hindu and Buddhist lore, dragons, twisted lizards, cherubim with tails, lions rampant, elephants, gods and goddesses with innumerable arms. Scriptures in Sanscrit are woven between these figures, admonishing the faithful and calling his attention to some of the minute but monstrous creatures that are bound to get him if he won't watch out. The smallest design is significant to the initiate, a scroll, a leaf, a bell ; each has its esoteric implication, and here of course are the eyes of Buddha benevolent and baleful both.

But although the Buddhist elements of Bhatgaon are immediately obvious, they are decadent ; they are rapidly dying before the encroachment of the fierce Hindu cults. Most of the Newar populace is Hindu, and their temples outnumber by three to one the graceful pagodas of Buddhism. And though these pagodas are of themselves lovely there are many which it would be unwise for the prim to enter. For Buddhism, here in decay, has absorbed the worst of Hinduism ; the Tantric philosophy, if it may be called a philosophy at all, has rotted the foundations of decency from Buddhism in Nepal, and the Bhatgaon temples are the theatre of its obscene practice. Buddha may smile benignly at the gate, but behind his back, crouched in the corners where the shadows are deep, sprawling along the rafters of the cells inside these temples, are images so obscene as to make you shudder when you learn, quite truly,

that they represent the orgies performed even to-day by men and women of the Tantric cult.

The debased come here to worship the revolting Vajra Satwa, the sixth and last of the Celestial Buddhas. The gongs are beaten, grease is rubbed on the images, libations of perfume are made to the gods and then libations of blood. And the sexual climax of the ceremony is devoted to that Sankara Acharya who sometime in the eighth or ninth century destroyed most of the Buddhist literature of Nepal. He began his crusade in India as a Brahman priest, swept through Nepal and over the mountains to Tibet, where he was finally killed by the Grand Lama who finished a violent discussion with him by transfixing his shadow to the ground with a knife. Sankara fell upon the blade, which slit his throat and killed him instantly. The Newars now say that it is in consequence of this pious act by the Grand Lama that the Buddhist religion is more pure and its scriptures more numerous in Tibet than in Nepal. And, forgetting the reverence still paid viciously to Sankara Acharya, they point with horror at the Hindu "Holi" festival in honour of Krishna, when on the eighth day before the full moon of the month of Phagun or early March, there are parades of hysterics marching the streets of Bhatgaon and flinging wet scarlet powder at one another to simulate virgins' blood. The sacrosanct Buddhist temples are thus befouled, and among the worshippers there are, invariably, the most sacrosanct Buddhists themselves. It is a jumble of obscenities from two literatures and two faiths which not even the devotees attempt to untangle.

The Taumari Tol, a smaller square, lies a short distance away, surrounding the pagoda known as the Nyatpola Deval, or the Temple of the Five Stages, for it stands on five terraces penetrated by a flight of enormous steps. Gigantic figures, carved in stone and coloured, stand on each side of the stairway; first two enormous, moustachioed wrestlers, then two elephants on the step above, then two lions. Two griffins

look over the heads of these, and on the top step, guarding the temple so ferociously that I should think twice about entering, even were I permitted, are the deities Singhini and Vyaghini, the most powerful of all these Bhairavis, these "Terribles," as they are called. Though Singhini and Vyaghini are supposed to be great enemies of the demons of evil, the temple they guard was originally planned as a shrine for the noisome Tantric order mentioned above. It is recorded that at the time of its founding, in A.D. 1700, the king himself brought three bricks for it, as an example to his people, and this act so stimulated the citizens of Bhatgaon that in five days all the materials needed for its construction were heaped upon the spot. Then the gods lent a hand and in five days more the temple was finished. The gods worked diligently by day, but at night their revels were so flagrant and debauched that even their Tantric worshippers were frightened to observe such evil, and would not worship there. The temple has remained unoccupied ever since, a memorial to an ultimate, the godly sin that passeth understanding.

Wonder is heaped upon wonder in Bhatgaon. The Golden Door is astonishing, the pillar of Bhupatindra Mall breathtaking by its clean and fantastic beauty, the Tantric temples admirable and appalling; but it is the temple of Bhavani, of the Buddhist Heavens, that makes you despair of cameras and colour film. A longshot of it will show the magnificent brazen dragons guarding the entrance, the twin lotus pillars with gilt lions atop them, each holding a double flaming banner of burnished gold, a great bronze bell which a pilgrim is ringing, perhaps, before she makes her offering of rice and flowers at the shrine. A holy *saddhu* sits cross-legged before it, his beard reaching to the ground and his arms held skywards paralysed, emaciated, for he has held them in this position for many years as proof of his piety.

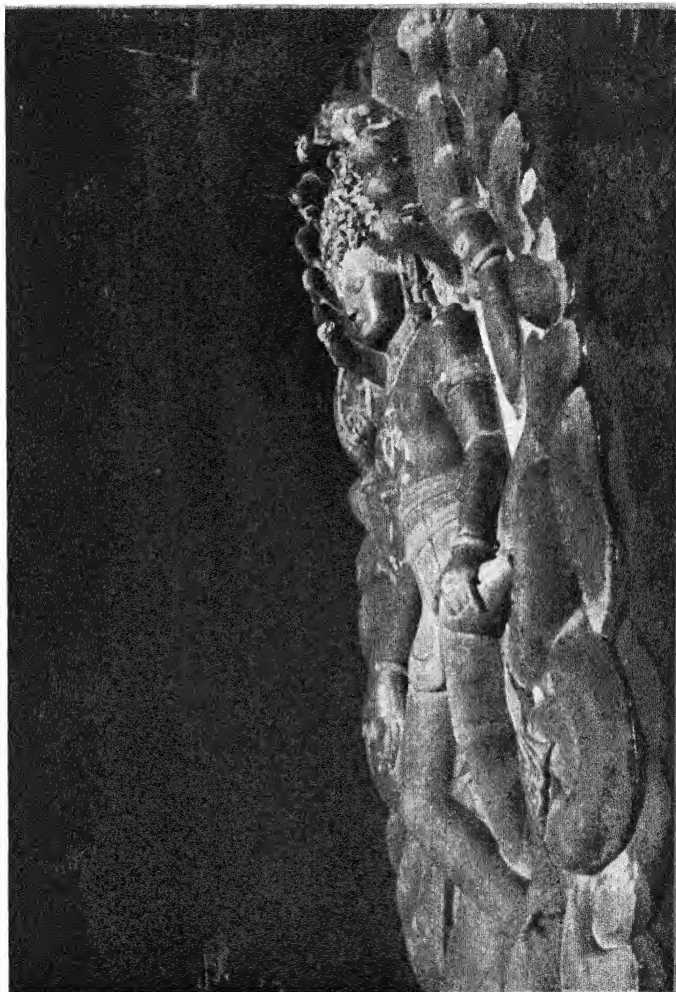
But the long-shot will not show you the astounding details of the building, the frieze of strange beasts' heads, the golden

façade with its intertwined patterns of religious symbols, nor the beauty of the windows which instead of being latticed with wood are grilled in flower patterns of strips of metal gilt. A close-up will miss the majesty of the whole and neither one shot nor the other will record the odour of grease, vermilion, incense, cow's urine exuding from the slime which the devout have rubbed upon the shrine itself until it is almost completely obscured.

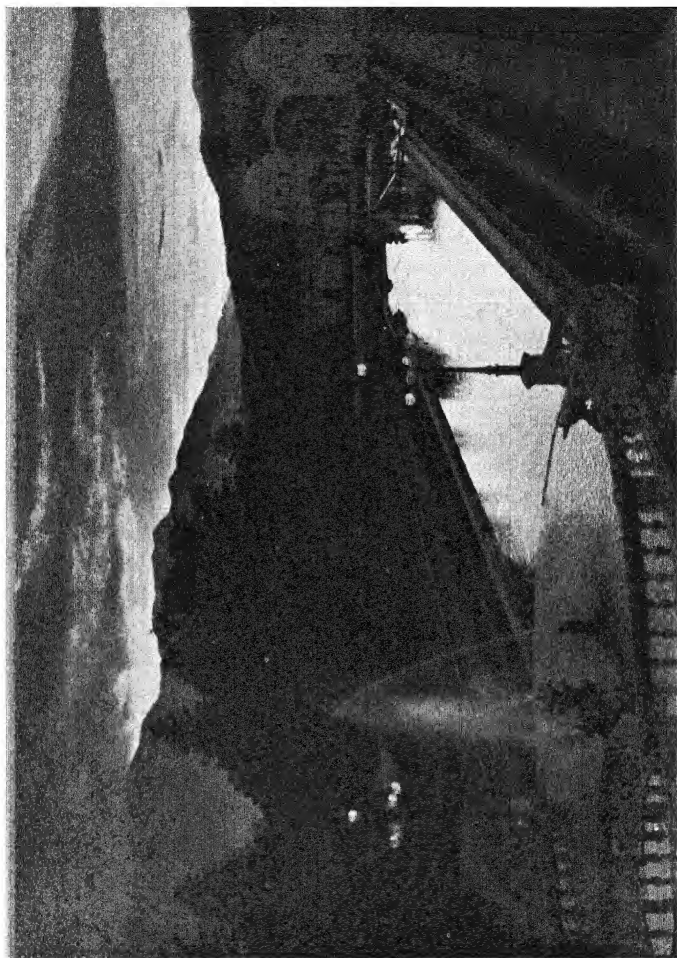
As we walked around this fabulous city, filming the crowds of pilgrims, of traders, of holy men against a background of architectural miracle and natural magnificence—for the Himalayas raised their snow peaks above it all—we glimpsed occasionally the inner life of Bhatgaon through a half-open doorway leading to a court where stone gods were clustered and the families living on the court were making their private offerings. We were forbidden here. I should gladly have taken off my shoes or crept on bended knees in pure worship of such mystery and beauty, but I was waved gently away. I was apart from this, a follower of an arid faith, a foreigner, unclean.

A whimsical sheep-herder from Tibet looked up at me and made noises of condolence, for he was a wanderer too, having come over the hostile mountains with all his trade goods strapped on the backs of his sheep. Four long-haired beggars danced around me, singing. A Gurkha soldier winked as he passed me, and whistled, of all incredible tunes, "Tipperary," for he had been in the war. Armand and Leila called that it was time for lunch.





NARAIN, THE GOD OF THE MIRACLE,
FLOATING IN HIS BED OF SERPENTS



THE GARDENS OF THE MAHARAJAH OF NEPAL

Massacre at the Kot 27

"LET IT BE known," said Armand, swatting a fly with one of Ram's rubber pancakes, "that we wish to see the best dancers of Nepal. All of them." He fixed Hospitality with a glare that meant he would brook no further nonsense "And let them assemble here, in our own yard, to-morrow, not later. If they have pressure, like High Highness, tell them that we have rupees."

Hospitality said only "Sssssss . . .," but to-morrow our dancers came, hundreds of them, crowding into our walled garden until there was scarcely space for ourselves. All were masked and costumed to represent the fiends of their exotic pantheon. Some of the masks were wood, some papier mâché, some were ragged cloths with a single eye and a round degenerate mouth from which radiated a web of vari-coloured wrinkles. Some were upside-down with beards growing over their foreheads and eyes where their mouths should be, and some had semi-precious stones suspended from their greasy hair.

Their musicians followed them with a weird collection of instruments, flat drums like dishpans, long drums of giant bamboo, horns, bells, kidney-shaped violins. And as the dancers leaped crazily into the yard so did the musicians burst into a frenzy of music that nearly split my skull with its din. Perhaps there was rhythm to it and musical design, but it seemed that each man of the score of them was playing independently in a vicious effort to drown out the others.

All morning they danced while we wandered among them, choosing the best of the lot for performance and costume. The garden wall was covered with onlookers who kept up a continuous circling as they were pursued by a tiny policeman with a switch. He was an inefficient switcher, for he carried a strange pair of English brogues in one hand and they seemed so

heavy that he was always on the point of being dragged by them off the wall. Still he switched eagerly and made the most hideous high-pitched sounds which we could hear even above the babel of music.

"We've got eighteen," said Armand. "That's enough. You tell them, Thapa, to come here three weeks from to-day, twenty-one days from to-day." He gave each man a slip of paper signed with his name, so that none but those we had chosen would return. The others we pushed out bodily with the help of the policeman who beat them with his shoes.

But one old man refused to budge, a gross little fellow with ugly, small, plump hands, a minor Lama, Hospitality explained, sent by the Maharajah "as a gift." He would do the ritual hand gestures of Lamaism for us, a signal honour. We were not impressed, but as it was unwise to affront His Highness by rejecting the fat gift, and as moving picture film was too precious to waste, Armand sent me off with him and Thapa to make a few still photographs.

"French film," Armand advised me, "unless he's much more charming than he looks." "French film" is no film at all. The suggestion of using it, common to all moving picture producers, means only that an empty camera should be cranked at those whom it is impolitic to offend. French film is the social mainstay of any expedition.

We drove off into a drizzling rain, Thapa and the Lama and I, waving good-bye to Hospitality who by now was completely baffled as to where his duties lay, whether with the four-fifths of the expedition who were going to sit at home and work on notes for the commentary of the film, or with the fifth member who unquestionably was driving away to forbidden territory with the Maharajah's plump gift.

I had the poor grace not to hold the hand of the gift when I flung my arm across the back of the front seat and he clutched at it, but I smiled pleasantly.

"He's a unique," said Thapa. A eunuch, I assumed. "He's

a unique in the service of Subha." That was Hospitality. "And of the King," he added.

Since Thapa had first arrived to shepherd us I had wondered at his bravery in continually baiting Hospitality who was the Maharajah's own ambassador. Now I understood as Thapa explained in his quaint English. The eunuch Lama was the fatted skeleton in Hospitality's closet, and Thapa, blithe, debonair, unscrupulous as a flea, had turned his secret information into blackmail. He was quite frank about it, and rather proud. Don't misunderstand, he said in effect, the Lama is an accredited Tibetan Lama right enough, though he has never had the sinew to climb the mountains to the spring of his religion. And then my chauffeur said convincingly an extraordinary thing. The Lama, he said, was one hundred and thirty years old.

I looked back at the man, drawing my hand into the front seat with me. He was as bland and brown and greasy and unlined as a new-made cruller. One hundred and thirty years old, Thapa repeated. He was present in 1846 at the massacre of Gagan Singh and the King's ministers. He was present twenty years earlier at a festival dedicated to Bhairab during which the eunuch priests slashed themselves with knives to the mad accompaniment of drums and flutes, while among the onlookers the hysteria spread like a wave and man after man, fascinated by the music and the heady stench of blood, sprang with a sword amongst the eunuchs and like them beatified himself by castration. Then he ran screaming through the city with the severed parts in his hand, until he threw them into one of the temples he passed in his fanatic flight. The priests of the temple thus honoured must thereupon furnish him with female clothes, and these he must wear, if he lived, for seventy-seven years.

Our Lama was among those celebrants, but not of them, yet.

It was not the seventy-seven years that bothered me about a man who looked sixty at the most, nor Thapa's exorbitant claim

that he was indeed over a century old. It was the recollection of a rite which Thapa could never have heard about in the small Indian schools he attended, the rite of Attis in ancient Phrygia, of the monster named Agdestis whose genitals, severed and planted, produced a pomegranate which the mother of Attis held to her bosom until it flowered into a son. Artemis of Ephesus and Astarte of Heliopolis had demanded the sacrifice of virility in very much the manner that Thapa had just described.

Perhaps, I thought, there was after all some reason to the theory that the folk of Nepal were descended from the army of Alexander the Great. If a custom which, to my knowledge, had been originally Near Eastern, had seeped through the deserts and the jungles and the mountains to far Nepal, if this could be accepted as I felt it had to be, reason could no longer baulk at the fantastic Alexandrian theory nor the statement that a nasty old man was one hundred and thirty years old.

"Now the King," said Thapa, blowing his horn gently at a sacred cow in the road.

"What King?"

"The King of Nepal." And he went on to tell of the strange dark lives of the Kings of Nepal. Since the accession of Jang Bahadur to the Prime Ministership long ago the kings had been utterly powerless, and though their signatures were required on important documents of State they had no word in State affairs; they had not even a rupee of their own. Otherwise they had everything. The present puppet king lived in a palace hardly less sumptuous than his Prime Minister's. The fairest, the softest, the most artful girls of Nepal were chosen by the ministerial cabinet to keep him contented, and over these our gift Lama presided; the sweetest opium of Mongolia was brought to him in jars of jade and its use encouraged alike by the paramours and the family physician. He must be contented; he must be a good little boy and keep his fingers out of the Nepalese jam-pot which should by rights be his. To this

end he had been enticed even before puberty with the dissipations which, in his twenties, left him vitiated of mind and body both.

"There his palace," Thapa said.

Squat and glittering white it stood, like a hospital, a sanatorium. There was a bandstand in front, where musicians skilled in erotic rhythms would play to a king who slumped in debauch behind curtained windows.

"Once," said Thapa, "he wanted to be an athlete. Now at night sometimes you see him, one foot on one horse, one foot on other horse, galloping through the garden over flowers. But his head aches so he falls hard off."

Poor little king, with all in the world he could want, except a country to call his own. I can imagine no more tragic scene than that one in the garden, the king riding two great horses, heroic and free for the instant before his vices overwhelm him and he "falls hard off."

The Lama in the back seat leaned forward and stroked the neck of Thapa, who jumped as though a leech had settled on him. The Lama whispered and I shivered at the sound.

"He says go to Bodhinath, his temple of Tibet, where he will make hands at you."

I shivered again and reached for the eight-inch lens, a hefty bludgeon. Mr. Hilton had led me to believe that the undying Lamas of Shangri-la had good clean minds. I wouldn't trust this old polyp with a mouse.

About three miles to the east of Khatmandu rose the largest Buddhist temple in the country, the Bodhinath or Kashachait, one hundred and thirty-five feet high. We saw from a great distance the blue and white enamelled eyes on its spire, staring straight at us, daring us to swerve from Buddha's Golden Way. Nowhere else in the world are there temples such as this. Nowhere had I ever seen such an awesome religious edifice, so powerful in all its proportions, so vital in the effect produced by those colossal eyes. It is because of them, of course, that you

feel the temple to be charged with a living faith, and not merely housing some quaint Oriental religion.

The Bodhinath is old beyond the records of Nepal, but it is believed to have been built over the tomb of an eminent Tibetan Lama named Kasha, who came on a pilgrimage from Lhasa, died, and was either cremated or interred at this spot. It is the magnet of all the great pilgrimages which occur during the winter months and is kept in repair by the authorities at Lhasa. The pilgrims clean away the weeds and moss with which it becomes covered during the rains, repaint the divine eyes on the four sides of the spiring *toran*, and mortar the minor fissures in the masonry.

The temple stands upon a square and very massive base which is composed of three broad terraces, rising one above and within another. From the top terrace rises a concrete hemisphere ninety feet across. This is encircled by a series of niches, each containing a stone relief of Amitabha, the third Divine Buddha ; there were hundreds of them, precisely alike, gazing serenely towards every part of Nepal. The square *toran* with the terrible eyes ascends from the hemisphere and supports a spire in the shape of a pyramid, the thirteen steps on each side of which are covered with plates of copper gilt. The crown of this stupendous monument which seems half temple and half the idol of a god, is for ever so freshly gilt that the reflection of the sun upon it can be seen like a heliograph for many miles. I have seen it by moonlight, a halo of gold floating over the sleeping town.

My Lama was whispering at me and beginning to weave his hands, for a fine drizzle had begun and he was eager to have his performance over with, now that Thapa and I had declined his advances ; we were not, as Lincoln Colcord insists on saying, romantical. But Thapa had a better idea. He led us around the temple, drawing his hand over the hundreds of prayer wheels set into its base as a child draws a stick along a picket fence. With the revolution of each a prayer for Thapa went

up to Heaven. We made the circuit just as the rain was squeezed full force from the sturdy Himalayan clouds, and ducked for shelter into one of the small *vihars*, or monasteries, which alternated with silversmiths' shops around the temple's flagged court.

I saw hands at first, more hands, the corded and tapering hands of the Lama who officiated here. They were in the light and shadow cast by a lattice window upon them as they very slowly turned the pages, or rather the boards, of a wooden book. An old man he was, a priest of eighty, said Thapa quietly, and added that he would die before very long, for he had not followed the Way as had our gift Lama, who would live for ever, of course.

The walls of this small room were entirely painted with Buddhas, and in the centre of the floor was a golden eye. Vermilion grease for anointing the images hung in a pot like a witch's cauldron by the side of the great wooden book. Old prayer wheels, their prayers rubbed out by a thousand years of pilgrimage, were heaped in one corner. I wondered if it would be possible to buy one, but I am a poor business man ; I am shy of offending people or even their gods in which I do not believe. I was humbled by this saintly old man who kept his finger on a word of Sanscrit all the while we were there.

But our gift-eunuch, who would live for ever, felt otherwise. He fondled my camera until I could feel its bellows shrink. I pulled out the roll of Panatomic film and replaced it with Super XX, for there was so little illumination through the rain-drenched window that the light metre gave no reading at all.

Quick as a wink the eunuch snatched a brass bell from his colleague, a brass mitre with brass earlaps from a shelf and commenced the ritual gestures. He minced and postured and lifted one ankle to the knee of the other leg, ringing the bell meanwhile, pointing to it, twisting his fat fingers in a manner that was horrible to watch and yet full of grace.

I had the feeling that those hands could do murder, that they

could pull a serpent apart. They would join fingers lightly, slither back to back ; a palm would pat an elbow, caress the bell, splay its fingers and suddenly make a circle with the fore-finger and thumb—exactly like the “ ad ” for Ballantine’s Beer—so quickly and smoothly, gesture flowing into gesture, that I had to use a camera speed of one five-hundredth of a second to separate them.

All the while the old eunuch was chanting, a weird litany which sounded like “ *Shambu-nath nia . . . O-denis nia . . . Sakya-mu nia . . .*,” varying constantly as he named the ceremony for which each series of gestures was prescribed. This one was for a marriage, this to consecrate the sacred elements, this to bless the head of a Buddhist novitiate. His eyes rolled, his tongue flicked in and out, he performed ballet steps with heel and toe. Absurd as it appeared, I could not deny that the man was an artist and an actor.

Now he shook violently the bell, or *Ghanta*, and swooped from somewhere amidst him the small brass thunderbolt of Indra called *Vajra* in Nepal, an instrument like a dumb-bell but with quadruple claws instead of a knob at each end. He banged the two together and sank the claws around the clapper of the bell, for the *Vajra* and the *Ghanta* are the Buddhist equivalents of the Hindu *Lingam* and *Yoni*, the male and female principles of life.

“ *Aum . . .*” he chanted, “ *mani . . . Padma . . . Hom,*” an invocation which has never been satisfactorily translated but means, in sum, “ O the Triform Godhead is in him of the Jewel and the Lotus.” Both the *Vajra* thunderbolt and the invocation—*mantra* is the proper word for it—are of Hindu origin but have been adopted by Buddhism.

Dr. Henry Oldfield writes of the *Vajra* : “ The scriptures say that a contest once occurred between Buddha and Indra, in which the latter was defeated, and had wrested from him his chief and peculiar instrument of power, the *Vajra* or thunderbolt, which was appropriated as a trophy by the victor and has

ever since been used by his followers as the favourite emblem of their religion. Buddhists regard this as the sacred symbol of their divine master's victory over the King of the Hindu Heavens ; and they venerate it accordingly, as the Mohammedans venerate the crescent, and as Christians venerate the Cross." It was another instance of the blending in Nepal of these two antithetic religions.

When I clipped the Leica to my belt again the old eunuch was still going strong. He was enthralled by his own words and gestures ; perhaps, though I doubted it, by the esoteric significance of them that was quite lost upon the infidel.

"Thapa," I said, "don't think I doubt you, but ask the Lama of this place how old he thinks our eunuch is."

The Lama raised his finger from the book, tapped it down lightly as he recited at length some story of which I could understand only the words "Gagan Singh." He stood in shadow for the sunlight now had slipped behind him to illuminate a brilliantly painted Buddha on the wall.

"One hundred and thirty years old," said Thapa. "He was present at the massacre following the murder of Gagan Singh. It is recorded."

When I looked incredulously at the eunuch Lama he seemed to be having a fit, for he was waving his arms like a windmill and prancing like a fat rabbit. "Boom!" he roared.

"That is the shot," said Thapa, "that killed Gagan Singh."

The old man was leaping about the monastery now, booming and wailing and swinging wide his arms as he enacted the story of the terrible massacre of September 14, 1846. The jangling of the bell in one hand was like the clash of swords, the brass thunderbolt in the other banged violently against prayer wheels, Buddhas, conch horns, to represent the firing from the old double-barrelled muskets. I sat on my hunkers in a corner out of harm's way, but the Lama Superior moved not an inch. He stood apart from the world, surrounded by the sunlit golden glory of his yellow robe, marking with a lean forefinger his

place in the wooden book. He spoke absently to Thapa from time to time, and Thapa told the story to me. I listened eagerly, for it was from this historic massacre that the revolutionary new order in Nepal was dated. The King was deposed; the Prime Minister, the great Jang Bahadur, achieved the omnipotent control which has remained in his family ever since.

It was in 1846 that life in Nepal had come to such a sorry pass that the King, half-idiotic, attempted to rectify matters to his people's and his own advantage. The Queen, who acted as Regent for him, was midway in a reign of terror. The severed heads of ministers were popping out of the palace like peas from a pod. The Queen was a one-woman Gestapo who executed on the slightest suspicion whoever seemed to stand in the way of absolute power for herself and the eventual crown for her son. The Prime Minister, Martabar Singh, was assassinated by bullets and slashes of a dozen *khukris* ("swish-swish-boom-swish . . . glug . . . glug . . . glug . . ." said the Lama), his body hacked to pieces in the presence of the King and Queen and flung out of the palace window. Soldiers loyal to him were led into the swampy Terai and left to rot of the awful *awal* fever. Their families were beggared by the appropriation of all their animals, chickens, goats, buffaloes, which were sacrificed before the terrible image of Khal Bhairab, in the Durbar Square of Khatmandu. There the corpses remained, until the pariah dogs and the flies were done with them, a putrid warning to those who would oppose the Queen.

Among these, however, was the King, a half-wit and a coward, but both sensible and desperately brave enough to try to stop the concentric swirl of slaughter that was rapidly approaching himself. He feared the Queen, but even more did he fear one Gagan Singh, the Queen's confidential attendant and paramour. This Gagan had originally been a menial in the palace and had risen on stepping stones of royal beds

until he reached that of the Queen, from which the King had long been deposed. Now with the execution of his namesake, Matabar Singh, the Queen made him Commander-in-Chief of the Army and vested in him, though without title, all the powers which the Prime Minister had had before.

The King stormed impotently about the palace, and tore the buttons from all his coats. If his honour was to be avenged and his very life preserved, it was necessary to destroy Gagan Singh. He disclosed his plan to his two sons by a former marriage and they in turn to several generals who were known to be still loyal to them. General Jang Bahadur was not consulted, for he was a nephew of the murdered Martabar Singh, and it was thought, mistakenly, that he was a follower of the Queen.

("Pish!" said the Lama.)

So on the night of September 14th, at ten p.m., Gagan Singh was murdered ("Boom!") while at prayer in his own house. The hired assassin escaped in the confusion that ensued, but he thereby accomplished the death of thirty-one military chiefs.

The news of the murder was quickly brought to the Queen, who had been awaiting her lover at the Hanuman Dhoka Palace. Seizing the sword of state in her own hand, she rushed afoot to the late general's house, shed never a tear over the body she adored, but, vowing vengeance on the murderers, proceeded to the Kot, or Court of Military Assembly, and ordered bugles to be blown for the collection of the troops, and messengers sent to demand the immediate presence of all civil and military functionaries of the State.

Our Lama came out of curiosity and was admitted because he was the only religious representative available. He was a man when he entered the quadrangle of the Kot, completely a man; when he left he was altered considerably.

High on a balcony stood the Queen of Nepal, brandishing her sword in the torchlight and demanding the name of Gagan

Singh's murderer. There was silence but for the padding of bare feet as Jang Bahadur, scenting new blood, surrounded the Kot with his own troops. Someone shouted the name of Bir Kishor Pandi, who was one of those the King had made privy to his plan, and he was immediately put in irons and chained to the gate. The Queen flew down the stairs, brandishing the sword of state, and would have hacked the chained man to pieces had not her ministers restrained her, and our Lama, so he claimed, thrown his arms around the prisoner.

The Queen accused one man after another, each minister by name; they accused each other; any one of them might be the next to go. *Khukris* were drawn. Another of those ill-fated Singhs, Abhiman Singh, tried to escape to his troops when shots rang out within the building ("Boom," etc.), and one of Jang Bahadur's brothers split Abhiman nearly in two. Our Lama scrambled up the ladder that led to the council hall just as the crowd was rushing upon Jang. Jang's brothers and his bodyguard fought to his rescue, killing all in their way, slashing right and left even among their own men, battering out the torches until that small room became a black pit of slaughter through which the Queen's laughter, on the floor above, shrieked cruelly.

Outside, the troops of Jang Bahadur shot everyone who attempted to leave the Kot. The bodies writhed in a heap before the fearsome image of Khal Bhairab. Inside, Jang, seizing this priceless opportunity, was fighting not only for his life but for the possession of Nepal, in perpetuity. Down the corridors and through the little rooms his men pursued the unarmed ministers, hunting them like rats, feeling in the dark for a body to quiver and then fall upon it. Whoever was unarmed, and there were many of these, was considered an enemy and slashed to ribbons.

Our Lama fled screaming to the ladder, fell down it head first in the dark, but he was too late. As he slid he heard the mad laughter of the Queen above him. The sword of

state came hurtling down, caromed off the wall, bounced on the top step, somersaulted as his head struck the ground below. The sword gave him only a glancing blow, but it unmanned him. He had just time before he fainted to crawl through the river of blood to the street where he saw the King slinking towards the house of the British Envoy, tearing buttons from his coat.

("Pip . . . Pip . . . Pip . . . Pip . . ." said our old Lama.)



The Place of the Dead 28

"THERE'S NOTHING LIKE it! Anywhere!" said Armand, and all the expedition's hearts were chirruping because he was cheered again. "It's fabulous! It's as remote from the world we know as Mars! It's a town of the dead, but it's as vital as . . ."

"What is?" asked Leila. "If you don't mind . . ."

Armand looked at all of us as if we were wilfully misunderstanding him, for such was his preoccupation with a suddenly discovered and photogenic wonder that its name seemed unimportant.

"Oh . . . Pashupatti. One of the holiest spots in all of Hindustan. And it is here in Nepal." I could see he was thinking that we were not very quick to follow him, but we were trying hard. "I spent the morning at the Maharajah's museum, making stills of the most extraordinary old books that were dated way before our Christian era. Old Vedas that made my head swim—I hope, by the way, that you got those river shots, Roy—and manuscripts which I swear are done in pictograph! Think of it! Central Asian pictographs here for the filming! Incidentally, Dave, you'd better

check this with Colonel Rand, and if he confirms it get some colour stills. Anyway, Thapa took me past Pashupatti on the way back and it's the most . . . Look, are we going or not? By the time we get our stuff set up, it will be five o'clock. The long shadows will be fine about then, but in another half-hour they will stretch clean across the gorge."

No one asked what shadows or what gorge, for this exuberance was too precious to meddle with. It was more precious than food on an expedition, as all of us knew. Jack went whistling out to the Dodge, reset the carburettor almost in the time it took us to squeeze in, and we were off in a flurry of jay-walking hens.

The reset carburettor showed its own exuberance and carried us through the Durbar Square to the terror of all the populace but one, an albino dressed in pink who was sitting on a high platform and making insane dance gestures with his hands. A colleague for the Lama, I thought, but just then Armand's quicker eye went past him and he called to Thapa to stop. Behind the pink boy on that stone platform was suspended what must be the largest drum in the world, fully eight feet in diameter, with a drumhead of mottled greyish leather.

"Rhinoceros skin," said Thapa. "The Maharajah shoots him."

"When is it beaten? Can we film it?" Armand was out to wring the soul from Nepal by now.

"In the morning," Thapa replied. "It calls the people to their prayers."

We spun on again, out of town, dividing the crowds of women who were on their way home to the hills after a day's imperceptible marketing. They might have exchanged a handful of beans for a carrot, or a few pounds of uncared wool for a bit of cloth woven by their more patient urban sisters. But they were happy. They chatted gaily, swinging strong mountainy hips. The sun flashed warm on their earrings and nose rings, and the cleanest wind in the world

whipped back their little jackets to show a triangle of skin the colour of new potatoes. And I recalled an astute remark from a book by Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, which I had been reading just the night before, in which, describing the sights of travel in Indo-China, he observed, "I could not fail to notice how much character it gives a woman's face to display her navel. . . ." Mr. Maugham was in a mood of facetiousness rare to him during that journey; I too was elated by Armand's infectious enthusiasm for the scene that lay ahead of us, but I noted with pride the seriousness with which I reflected that the navels of Nepal were neatly made. This was by no means an unimportant discovery, for throughout India, through Africa, the South Seas, the crude methods of child delivery, and consequent maternal care produce the most appalling navels, whereas here in Nepal, among mountains as effectually isolated as the remotest Pacific island, there was apparently—I confirmed it later—an obstetric science of considerable skill.

Still, this was Buddha's home, I thought, and as he was the most famous student of one navel, at least, that ever lived, his disciples could do no less than devote some attention to what had pleased their Master. As the umbilical cord is the conduit of life it is not surprising that there should exist an extensive navel-lore which varies but little across the world. The Tuhoe tribe of the Maoris attributed the power of making women fruitful to certain trees upon which the navel-strings of children had been hung. In Australia, in the Caroline Islands, among the Cherokees the cord is preserved, according to Frazer, as a talisman which may profoundly affect the child's later life, and in peasant Germany to-day I have known a midwife to present the cord to a baby's father with the counsel to guard it carefully, for should it be lost the child would certainly die.

I had become as exuberant as Armand by my discovery, and now even shared with him the ghoulish but sociologically

justifiable hope that we might see some poor Indian come to Pashupatti to die.

"There's your navel-worship again," I said.

"Where?" said Armand dreamily.

"At Pashupatti, at Benares, at any cremation ghat. The navel is always plucked from the burning corpse and set adrift on the sacred river. I've seen it countless times in Ceylon, as you have. Not nice, I grant you, but there you are. Now look, in Nepal . . ."

"Hell!" said Jack. "We hunt for corpses, we hunt for navels. We're explorers. Judas!"

Down we went to the valley where the most sacred Baghmatti River meanders from the hills bordering Tibet to the Indian province of Behar. The legend tells that Kaskat Sand, the fourth mortal Buddha, ascended Mount Sheopuri during a pilgrimage to Nepal, and there he met a party of traders coming down from Bhot, which we now call Tibet. They were cocky fellows, well-to-do, bringing all kinds of wonderful trade goods for barter with the Nepalese, blankets of yak hair, crystals, agate, turquoises, gold dust, gold and silver ores, ponies, watch-dogs, and sheep. The sheep carried loads of rock salt, that precious commodity, upon their backs.

The traders were inclined to scoff at the old ascetic, Kaskat Sand, but they made camp with him, and before the night was over, before any of them had slept, before Kaskat Sand had reached midway in his quiet, conversational preachment of the Buddhist faith, they all were begging him to initiate them into it. They would build a shrine right here, they said, and sacrifice all their trade goods, with the exception of the animals, which Buddhists may not kill. They would inlay a shrine with their precious stones, and spread their carpets on its floor, and leave their salt where the lean wolves could get it. And one of them, an exceptional artist, would fashion an image of Buddha from the great rock which was protecting them from the wind.

Kaskat Sand would baptize them, he said, but nowhere could they find a drop of fresh running water. So he placed his hands against the rock, and pressed his thumbs beneath it, and when his prayer was ended there rushed forth instantly a cataract of water in which he proceeded to baptize the new disciples. They were as good as their word, for all that winter they laboured in the snow to cut an image on the rock. They enshrined it handsomely, but the shrine has mostly crumbled now, and the spring which was formed from it has grown through the years to become the sacred Baghmatti River.

There was a sudden blowing of conches and horns as we drove through the streets of Pashupatti, but it was not for us. We were not welcome at all in this purely Hindu community. There was a funeral arriving, a pre-funeral, as it were, for the man on the litter was not quite dead.

The long cortège wound past us, the trumpeters in front with long wooden Tibetan horns, bound with brass and semi-precious stones, belling at the end in true horn fashion but holed like a flute. They made a hell of a din. The dying man was carried by four pink-turbaned fellows on a litter. Torches were propped in each corner of it, and their sparks spattered over the winding-sheet. Behind came men with tiny drums, and behind them came the mourners, looking more bored than bereaved.

I had raised my camera for a shot of this old procession when I saw through my finder a flash of white. It was Hospitality's scandalous notebook, recording, unquestionably, that not only did we put the evil eye upon the living but upon a poor devil who was already at the point of death. I waved. He waved and joined us.

"Sssssso sssssick," he said.

Armand descended like the wolf from the fold. "You remember the Lama?" he demanded in a burring, menacing

tone. "The old gift Lama? He has told us, so to speak, all. Now will you lend me your pencil?"

Hospitality blanched white and green. It looked as if his ears were decaying. Slowly, with a sizzle of humility, he passed the pencil to Armand who tucked it far away in the band of his hat. Then we went into the labyrinth of Pashupatti's shrines.

Here is literally a city of death, yet it has a weird unworldly loveliness. The river runs through a gorge in the centre of it and disappears on each side into canyons so narrow and so dense with arching foliage that the water there can scarcely be seen. In the cliffs are cells, tier upon tier of them, arduously chiselled by the fakirs of ten centuries who have come to absorb the beneficence of the river and meditate through all their days upon life and death. They have paled in the gloom of the caves and canyon, and when you see them climbing laboriously up their frayed rope ladders they look like nothing so much as three-toed sloths. Like animals they peer from their dens suspiciously. Their hair is matted. They are ulcerous and foul. They are very holy.

The canyon walls diverge as the river comes to the place of the temples, and along the left side rise courts and squares at various levels, each cluttered with temples, shrines, stupas, topes, with images of the gods, with isolated gateways leading nowhere but cherished by barren women who believe that by passing through them they will conceive. The great temple of Pashupattinath is in the middle of this religious welter, surrounded by immense walls to deter the gaze of the unbeliever. But the temple roof glitters gold above, with its elaborate phallic finials saluting the sun, and over the wall can barely be seen the golden prongs of a huge trident, the sceptre of Shiva, forty feet high. The temple is said to commemorate the flight of Shiva in the form of a gazelle on a day when he had wandered the earth without his trident and so could not defend himself against the demons. He took

refuge in the sacred wood called Shleshmantaka, in the remains of which Pashupatti now stands.

Somewhere within these walls, we knew, was the colossal statue of Nandi, the sacred bull of Hindustan, heavily plated with gold, which several envoys of a hundred years ago had described, but we were forbidden to see it. At first Hospitality claimed it didn't exist; there was no kneeling bull ("Kneeling, eh?" said Armand). Then there might be a bull, and finally there was indeed, the most sacred, the most beautiful, the most magnificent god's image in the world, Hospitality admitted, almost in tears, gazing far up to where his pencil reposed in Armand's hat.

He was given the pencil, but with a bound he was out of reach of us and reciting the pat phrase he had learned for such occasions as this: "But in London there are places where *we* may not go."

Even Thapa was adamant. Once, he explained, a German geologist had forced his way into the temple and looked at the bull, and the Maharajah had been obliged to pay nearly a lakh of rupees (about \$40,000) to have the precincts cleansed by the holiest men in India and Nepal. Since then it had been forbidden for non-Hindus even to glance at it through the secret door.

But a gateway opened on the other side of the steep stone stairs and I had a momentary glimpse of the astonishing life within. It was a grassy court surrounded by brown *sal* wood buildings, webbed with carvings and anciently decayed. A dozen *saddhus*, nude but for gee-strings, sat on the grass or lolled in the shade of the walls or paced back and forth aimlessly. One wore antique glasses and stared at the sun as he walked, turning at the corners of the court with his eyes always full upon it. One, who had saved all the hair of his body since childhood, had pig-tails so long that they dragged on the ground behind him, for he had woven the combings back again in the belief that he was thus insuring his integrity.

Perhaps he ate his finger-nails as well. You could carry this business, I thought, to unpleasant extremes. There were young men and old, all bearded, but the youth who caught my eye was a bronze-whiskered giant in a leopard skin. He bared his teeth at me, yellow teeth with food caked between them, half crouched and paced towards me like the beast whose skin he wore.

I held my ground and rubbed the sweat from my hands against my trouser pockets. I could smell him before he reached me, and as he advanced I wondered whether I would be able to smash in those teeth before they gave me rabies. But he stopped, close enough for any agile bacillus to jump, and put out his hand to caress my shoulder tenderly.

He led us without a word down the stairs to the river and stood thoughtfully by while we filmed the colourful crowd at the ghats. Continuous steps led up from the water to a long pavement where groups were gathered around the sellers of flowers and temple offerings. Some sold coconuts, the emblem of female fertility, brought over the mountains from the Indian shore; some sold rice by the dozen grains. Men, women, and children swarmed to bathe in the sacred river, to drink its cleansing waters. With the greatest of dignity the girls would raise their gorgeous saris as they waded out, hold the cloth in their teeth, scrub themselves mysteriously under water and gradually let the saris descend as they emerged. Some threw coins to the Baghmatti, and the husky youths whose livelihood was the retrieving of them slipped into the water quietly, as if to relieve a goddess of baubles for which she had no further use.

The life of Pashupatti had a quality which was at the same time vivid and serene, gay and grisly, the great crowds worshipping in gladness at the flanks of the sacred bull or in the life-stream and the death-stream of the river. But within the cloistered cells along the pavement of the river bank lay princes and beggars, hoping with all their hearts for one thing

only, that they should die neither too soon nor too late but at that moment of their souls' dusk, between waking and dreaming for ever away, when the *gurus* should immerse their feet in the sacred river.

To us, it seems a strange ambition. To the Oriental there are beauty and the fulfilment of a proper destiny in being dragged from one's deathbed in, say, Central India, jolted over the mountains in a basket, and decanted into a river which is chilled by the Himalayan snows. All the long life long, he'll say, death is at my feet; now let it chill them gently in these good waters, that my heart shall be prepared for its embrace.

Heaped into corners, sprawled against walls engraved with demons, lay the dying. Many were near skeletons already, some were festering packages of fat. I envied them their faith, but I thought too how terrible it must be to lie here testing one's soul, plucking at it with the mind to see if it were loosening from the poor body, saying, in effect, "Soul, are you ready? If we go now to the river, will you leave quietly, or will you torture me still?" And when the soul is ready, the body that bears it is borne down the steps of the ghat to a slanting slab of stone where it reclines, its feet laved by the goddess of the waters as the feet of the poor were laved by Christ, tenderly and sweetly, until the soul departs.

The wild *saddhu* who had not bitten me led us across the bridge to an assembly of temples and shrines that were as austere as those of the other bank had been gaudy. There was row upon row of grey stone shrines dedicated to Siva, each containing the god's phallic emblem, a huge black *lingam* rising from the female emblem of the *yoni*. I stood in shadow as an exquisite Hindu girl, dragging a goat by his ears, went to one of these. The animal bleated when the smell of death of a thousand past sacrifices reached him from the shrine, but the husband held it now while the girl entered on hands

and knees, touched her forehead to the stone phallus and sprinkled marigolds around it. Then the goat was pushed in, its throat extended across the phallus and deftly cut by the man, so that the emblem was inundated with blood and the encircling cup of the *yoni* filled.

I turned suddenly at a hideous sound behind me and just over my head. A dozen sacred rhesus monkeys had found me out and were making a terrific racket of either welcome or menace ; I couldn't tell which. Leila was feeding them corn which the *saddhu* had procured for her, and when he whistled a hundred more came leaping from shrine to shrine down the hill, swinging in the trees above them, loping like dwarfs on the stairs. One old fellow, whose hind legs had been broken in some monkey battle, walked laboriously on his hands for a few yards, rested, swung himself on to his hands again, and finally came to sit peacefully at my feet, his mouth open to receive the kernels as I dropped them.

Roy had set up his camera between two huddled images of the sacred bull and had started to film the increasing swarm of monkeys when a cow came limping across the scene. All her back was raw, the hair and hide burned down to the quivering veins of her flesh—the work of Mohammedans, said Thapa. There were few Mohammedans in Nepal ; they had never been able to obtain even a fraction of this country as they had almost all of India once, but those who were here, disguised as Hindus, constituted a religious Fifth Column to fight both Buddhism and Hinduism from the earth. Sabotage was rare, but it was terrible. Here was an example of it, this pathetic cow, whose back had been soused with kerosene and set afire, to prove to the Hindus that their so-called sacred cattle were under no protection of the Hindu gods.

“Coo ! Coo ! Coo !” called the *saddhu*, and the monkeys came rollicking down from the temple roofs and up from the shrines by the river, mostly females with babies like minute jockeys riding on their backs, or hanging on for grim life

under their bellies and trying to feed *en route*. For these hundreds of females that swarmed around us there could have been no more than a couple of dozen males. They were twice the size of their ladies, long-fanged and fierce to snatch the corn from our hands. There were three tribes of them, said Hospitality (it was his turn now), which must be fed, at government expense, on three separate occasions each day, for there was a feud among them which made it impossible to feed the three tribes together. The criss-crossed scars on the faces of the old warriors attested that.

Leila too had her scars of monkey battle, earned at Putnam, Connecticut, on that amazing menagerie of a farm. Now she was in the thick of the milling animals and stooping to pick up a baby which seemed a day or two old. It was no more than eight inches tall, a twisted and pitiful creature, abandoned by its mother because its spine was broken and it was paralysed from the waist down.

Painfully it dragged its body from step to step, its legs limp behind it. It made mewling noises as it reached for Leila's hand.

Armand cried suddenly, "Leila! Be careful!"

I lowered my camera to see three savage males snarling at us from the roof of a temple, and a fourth jumping up and down with fury upon the headless body of the sacrificial goat.

"I can't leave it like this!" Leila protested. "We've got to do something!"

Roy whirled his camera to catch a scene as frightening as any I had ever beheld. Every monkey had dropped its corn, and the hundreds of them, fangs bared, were pacing slowly towards us; and though they were small, that army seemed as terrible as the little Gurkha infantry must have been to the immense Englishmen who once had attempted to invade Nepal. A similar scene flashed across my memory: I was in Andorra, that little nation in the Pyrenees, sitting idly on the crag of a mountain top when a parade of ants passed by

my feet. One little ant ran alongside the ranks of the others, trying to break in, but they would have none of him; he was outcast. Again and again he tried to get into the procession, sometimes by force, sometimes, apparently, by pleading with an ant whose carelessness in keeping file might mean that he didn't value the position, but always he was sternly rebuffed, until I, taking pity on him, breached the ranks with a stick and put my favourite in. Then that happened which raised the hackles on my neck. The whole parade right-faced, at right angles to their line of march, and started towards me. Their line was about four feet long and consisted of perhaps three hundred ants, but all of them turned as by a word passed from mouth to mouth and approached me. I can't say that they looked angry or seemed wild with vengeance. They resembled more a punitive expedition, intent upon righting a wrong which had been done to the mass of them. They had chosen to expel one of their members from their ranks, and as I had interfered with the execution of this proper law I must be chastened. I would have been too, I believe, had I not jumped up in real alarm, apologized and set off down the mountain by another route, a shamed Gulliver retreating from Lilliput. Roy's respect for the ants and his homage of feeding them, I could well understand.

"I'm all right," said Leila. "Keep on cranking, Roy." But she was over-confident. She had just touched the crippled baby when a ferocious beast hurtled through the air and landed upon her shoulders. Another one leaped for her throat. A dozen screaming females plummeted from the temple tops. All hell broke loose in the small shapes of a score of monkeys leaping upon Leila and tearing at her legs. We could scarcely get to her because of the barrier of brown bodies between us. There were hundreds of them now; all three tribes must have joined forces against the alien enemy. Armand was shouting and ploughing forward, but I couldn't hear what he said. An occasional monkey was snapping at

me now, although they knew that Leila was the one they must destroy. I kicked and smashed at them, hoping to God the Hindus would stay out of this, for we were unarmed. Jack was beating them down with his topi. Roy was making wilder noises than they were and slashing them with a camera strap.

I looked for Leila. She had fallen and disappeared beneath a squirming, screaming, tearing hill of monkeys. She couldn't last. They would kill her in a matter of moments if we didn't reach her.

Armand was fighting closer, kicking up monkeys like ploughed earth from a furrow, while I worked as near to him as I could, catching the beasts by a leg or a tail and flinging them into the sacred Baghmatti. It was like fighting an army of maniacal children; you couldn't loose their hands from your clothes nor their small sharp teeth from your flesh when they had gripped it. Armand's face was covered with blood when he bent over the writhing, living pile that had Leila in it, somewhere.

"The tripod!" he yelled.

"For God's sake, the tripod!" I yelled to Jack. It was thrown from hand to hand with the precious Akeley still upon it, until Armand clutched it by one leg and swung the heavy camera against the animals. It catapulted them away. We could see Leila, bloody and limp on the ground. Another swipe with it and a dozen more fell away. My own hands were so thick with blood that I could scarcely hold them to sling them into the river now. Back and forth like a pendulum Armand swung the tripod and camera, throwing monkeys to right and left—one square in my face—battering in those demoniac little brains that had one thought only, to tear to ribbons the hateful soft flesh on the ground.

We cleared a space around her. One by one we beat off the bigger males that were left until the last of them gave up and retreated to the temple roofs.

Armand knelt beside the bloody body of his wife, his breath rasping like a grindstone, and tremblingly turned her over. Her torn hands held her hat tight to her face.

"All right, Leila. It's all right. They've gone."

Slowly her hands lifted the hat away. She tried hard to grin.

"Don't ever tell me I fainted," she said weakly. "Because I didn't. Am I all in one piece?"

Miraculously she was. The monkeys had torn her tough khaki clothes to shreds, but they had bitten her seriously in only a few places, mostly on the back. What had begun as an attack upon her had apparently become a tribal battle with her as the battlefield, a mass of bodies packed so tight that they could do her no great damage. She was bleeding freely and her scalp was spotted with red where the hair had been torn from it, but she was, thank God, alive.

Thapa and Hospitality were nowhere to be seen; the crowd of threatening Hindus was responsible for that. They were crossing the bridge towards us, towards the infidels who had defiled their holy ground and flung sacred monkeys into the river.

"Here we go again," said Armand, reaching for the tripod. But when the crowd had almost reached us, our *saddhu*, our blessed beggar, swooped Leila to his filthy shoulder and made a way with her through the crowd. We followed at his heels, lugging the smashed equipment. We reached the car, where Thapa and Hospitality were calmly sitting. And we drove home fast.



God of the Miracle

29

IT WAS NOT at all a good sign when the gifts of fruit, venison, and rotten eggs abruptly stopped coming to us from the Maharajah. It was a very bad sign indeed. Even Hospitality would not say outright that the battle of the monkeys was in any way our fault, for it was obvious that Leila had tried to help the crippled youngster; but we had caused confusion, and that in itself was bad. We had disrupted a small part of the peace of the valley; our simple presence had done it, the presence of the foreigners whom the Maharajah and his forebears had so rigidly excluded for fear of just such a small contretemps as this. The damage we had done? We had been foreigners in the public eye, people to wonder about, to cause talk in the bazaars and speculation as to how the world was whence we had come. Was there perhaps a pleasanter and richer land beyond the mountains? Even though we were in no way to blame, even though this was remote Nepal, we had sinned against good taste by being spectacular.

Colonel Rand leaned thoughtfully upon his knees as we travelled in his large car to see the pools of Narain, the god.

"I'll talk to His Highness," he said, "and see if I can explain it. The deuce of it is that he may be willing to believe that you don't kill sacred monkeys or any monkeys for the fun of it, but after this epidemic of cow-burnings it may be hard to get the people to believe. That's the point. There are two sides to it, one that you, inadvertently, may have stirred up the Nepalese, and two, that they may some dark night stir you into mush. You're the guests of His Highness, and so of course he can't take a chance on that."

Leila twisted in her bandages. "Do you mean seriously that that could happen?"

"I certainly do. The Maharajah himself admits that the

fanatics are beyond his control, and here, as in India, one man out of every dozen is a religious fanatic. Perhaps you don't realize that you owe your lives to that grimy *saddhu* who carried Mrs. Denis through the crowd."

Armand grinned. "I realize it, all right. I sent him one of our special chromium-plated medals as a reward. Thapa says he loved it, but what he'll pin it on I don't know. And it would be indecent to guess."

The water gardens of Balaji are situated about two and a half miles from Khatmandu, at the foot of the prong of mountains which the god Narain, like the Buddhist priest already mentioned, pierced to let water issue and assuage a terrible thirst. It was the god's festival this day, but it had not yet begun. We walked through a grove of green bamboo and past a Tantric temple to an idyllic acre of ground. This, said Roy, was truly Shangri-la. Set in smooth green-swards were the rectangular pools, vivid and tremulous with the many large Asiatic carp which the pilgrims had fed since immemorial time. Some had yellow bodies with bright green fins, and some were bronze with fins of purple. They lolled in the water, thinking holy thoughts, till one of them lazily died and turned white belly upward. Then the mob was upon him, tossing his body from cruel mouth to mouth, and in less than a minute there was nothing left but a wraith of bone.

All the pools were fed with crystal-clear water from rows of ornamental stone spouts, the *makaras*, the heads of the beast that is half dragon, half dolphin. Children laughed beneath them, and screwing up their faces to imitate them spat water at each other. An old woman bearing on her back a load of wood that could not have weighed less than a hundred and fifty pounds washed out her mouth at a fountain, rinsed the sweat from her face and again took up the journey to the mountains. She would no longer be tired after drinking the nectar of a god.

Colonel Rand smiled kindly as she passed. "It's not nice

to think about," he said, "but I can assure you she would far rather drink the urine of any cow. That is the most magical fluid, you know, in the Hindu pharmacopœia. Here's the pool of Narain I was telling you about."

I thought at first there was a corpse in that pool, so cunningly sculptured was the god and so cleverly placed, half in and half out of the water, that the movements of the fish and the wind ripples gave a semblance of life to it. He reclined full length upon a bed of stone serpents which seemed actually to writhe about him.

It is believed by the Nepalese that the god himself lies thus in a pool near the top of the mountain Gosainthan. The only European ever to have seen it is, I understand, Dr. Henry Oldfield who partially explored Nepal in 1851. He describes this lake or pool called Nilkhiat which holds in its waters "a large tawny-coloured rock, of an oval shape." The worshippers of Narain (Nilkhiat, Siva, Mahadeo, depending on the avatar you prefer) standing on the shores of the sacred lake, believe this rock to be the god. But all must see it with eyes that are feverish and fatigued, for the journey to Gosainthan is always a perilous one. Landslides are common because of the melting of the snow; and many a pilgrim has been buried beneath them. The track is precipitous and narrow, the cold intense. The huts of the Bhotiya tribes are found no longer beyond ten thousand feet, so that the hundreds of pilgrims who flock up the mountain during the season of pilgrimage must fight for the icy caves. It is no wonder then that visions appear to them and that the god to whom they have travelled these heart-breaking miles should rise from his cold couch.

But there are degrees of piety, and those who had insufficient to make the climb brought the mountain to Mahomet, in the Nepalese fashion, by constructing two tanks with stone images of Narain in the valley. Two hundred years ago the first was built at the village of Budanila Kantha, but somehow

there grew the legend about it which maintained that should the reigning monarch of Nepal ever visit this stone image his death would follow immediately. Therefore, the second pool, fed from the same source, was constructed at Balaji, so that the Maharajah might worship with impunity.

"The festival will be starting," said Colonel Rand, as we stood gazing at the image, each of us dreaming of what a superb film there would be in that pilgrimage to one of the highest and least accessible shrines in the world; the half-nude pilgrims with their staves, fighting the wind-swept snow, the bitter battles for the shelter of the caves, the mirages of exhausted minds, the false peaks, the mountain spectres, finally the true lake and the pilgrims kissing its waters and sacrificing at their edge the goats which they have carried warmly blanketed while their own bodies froze.

The Colonel divined our thoughts. "You'd like to go? Of course you would. I hate to remind you that I have been permitted to travel only twelve miles from my embassy. In the first place His Highness is unwilling to have us learn how little control he has over the tribes that live outside his capital valley; you'd probably be killed by Tcherpas or Bhotiyas just to see if your meat was white like your skin. And furthermore I *know* . . . there are rites performed by the primitive tribes which His Highness deplors and would prefer foreigners not to see. He has helped these* people immeasurably. He is an admirable man and a sovereign genius, but he has had terrible odds to contend with."

The car was climbing a hill towards the perfect square of cypresses which crowned it. Colonel Rand blew the toughest smoke ring I have ever seen. It went over our heads, unbroken, and drifted solid as a doughnut above the scattered procession of people who were climbing to perform their devotions at the feet of the god Narain. Children were labouring upon the road we travelled. . . .

"I'm afraid we're out of bounds," said the Colonel.

Children were labouring, tots from about six to ten, carrying upon their backs small baskets which they filled with the earth washed down from the rice fields and dumped in the ruts. It was child labour; it was gruellingly hard; but it trained these peasant kids to the trade which was one of the profitable few that were open to them; they would become porters on the mountains of Nepal. It will be they in the future who will carry the inevitable locomotive across the minor Himalayas, which still, I hope, will not be spanned by road.

"His Highness is rapidly improving the roads of the valley," said Colonel Rand, "the few of them that there are, but the trail in from India is deliberately kept poor as a deterrent to invasion. I have heard stories of another trail, a very easy one, along the course of the Baghmatti River all the way from Behar to Khatmandu, but no European has ever been permitted to follow it."

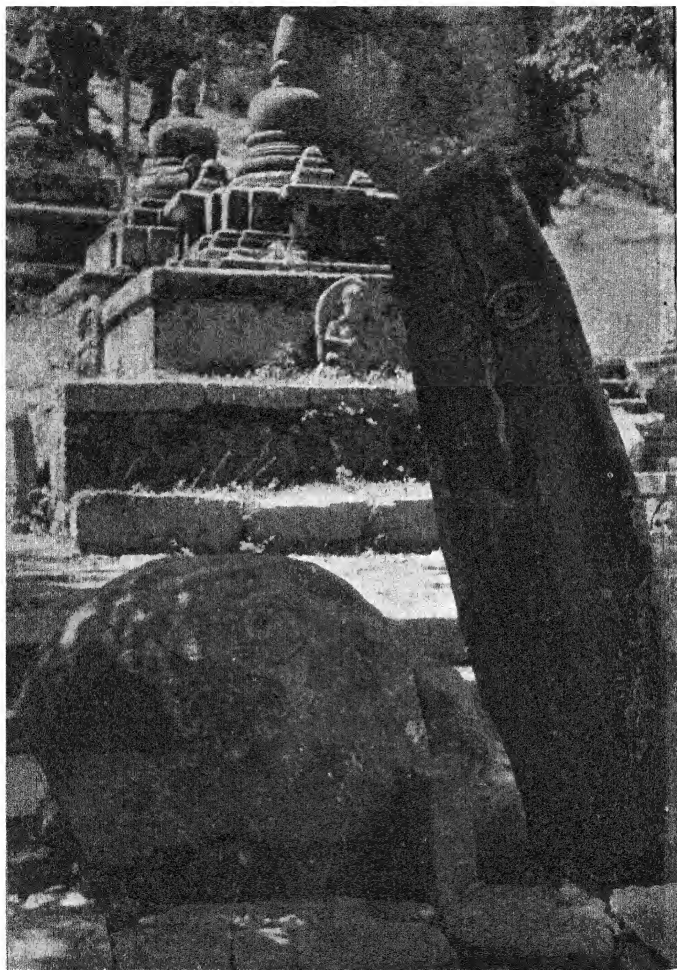
We arrived at the cypresses and a scattering of houses with red tile roofs.

"This village is known," said the Colonel, "as Budanila Kantha, or the Hill of the Goitre to those who are lucky enough not to live here."

Here again we found that incongruity which is peculiar to Nepal: a people happy, self-sufficient, needing nothing which their gods and the good Maharajah had not supplied; peace and sweetness and light seemed to be theirs when you saw them suddenly, and when next you looked you saw sheerest horror. The Hill of the Goitre had attracted to it the most monstrous human beings in Nepal. Goitre was prevalent, and double goitres, and goitres overlaid by boils. Cretins, imbeciles, idiots, dwarfs, went flapping around us as we climbed to the foot of the shrine. A pock-marked little girl with eyes as sweet as pansies tried to straighten her crooked body when she smiled at me with those soft eyes. One of her legs was so short, the result of infantile paralysis, probably,



SWAYAMBHUNATH TEMPLE



THE OLDEST GODS IN NEPAL

she looked up and smiled, shaking her head in pity of him.

There was the sound of musical instruments at the entrance to the walled garden. The bells stopped ringing. The shush-shush of whispering died as all heads were turned to the gate. Three elephants, caparisoned in gold and red velvet, with embroidered masks over their faces, lifted their trunks while from the central one an old man descended. He was simply dressed in tight-fitting black trousers and long black jacket that buttoned to the throat, and there was great dignity to him as he paced to the pool of the god. Attendants followed with tall fans of peacock feathers. They flung sandalwood incense into the air, where the rich scent of it was spread by the fans.

My child made a tremulous sound and led me to one corner of the pool, where I found myself in the midst of the expedition. Not only the Akeley but the sound camera as well were set up, and Armand was whistling softly into the microphone to test his controls. I disengaged my hand from the child's, picked up the colour camera and gave the Ikonta to her, showing her how to watch the scene through the magical peep-hole on top.

She smiled; it was glorious when she smiled. She was entranced by the tiny theatre of the lens. The old prince went slowly from bell to bell, making obeisance at each, until he came to the steps leading down to the pool. A servant followed him—a young man with a goitre, I noticed—as he descended to the feet of the great god sleeping in his bower of snakes upon the waters. This image was four times the size of the one we had just seen at Balaji, and infinitely more holy.

I heard the clicking of Roy's Akeley and the whirr of the sound camera. The ear-phones were slung around Armand's neck; sweat beaded his forehead. His eye was strained at the camera window but one fist waved none the less belli-

gerently at Hospitality who was doing a sort of diarrhoetic dance of anguish because, I assumed, he had had no instructions to let us film the *puja* to the god Narain.

The old prince removed his shoes on the bottom step and flung the garlands which his servant carried upon the stone figure. He kissed the feet of the god three times and cringingly crept up its gigantic body, dropping flowers the while, until he reached the forehead, which he marked with the three white parallel lines that are the insignia of Siva. Then all over the courtyard rose the chant of "*Narain ! Narain !*" while he backed slowly to the steps again, sprinkling rice on the god and in the water that was his home.

Hospitality, resigned, was whispering, "This god grew all by himself, without the hand of man."

In an instant the crowd had gathered again and the old prince was gone to the sound of Gurkha music and the faint plod of elephants down the road. The court thronged with the *puja* pilgrims and the weird inhabitants of the village, the goitrous, the monstrous, the dwarfs. I turned at a choked cry behind me. My child was staggering away into the crowd, and the Ikonta lay where she had dropped it. She seemed to grope her way forward, clutching blindly for the wall by the pool, and to my amazement the crowd parted before this deformed and humble peasant girl.

She groped for the great bell and rang it weakly. It nearly jerked her from her feet. She fumbled, step by step, to the supine god of the pool and made her way along its body until she reached its head. Hands pressed flat together in the prayer gesture common all over the world, she bowed her forehead to touch that of the god, then held the grey cheeks tightly with her small fingers. Her body began to shake; sobs rushed through it; she trembled so violently that I feared she would fall into the pool.

Hospitality's mouth was open and drooling. Thapa's hands were raised in prayer.

As suddenly as the tremor began, it ended, and from all the crowd burst the cry of "*Narain! Narain-ab!*" The child turned and moved down the body of the god, up the steps, towards us; and as she passed into the press of the street my heart went cold.

She was limping no longer. She was healed.



The Ghosts of Patan 30

THE MAGIC OF the East may be a myth, or a traveller's tale like this you are reading, to be adjudged either by faith alone or by the agnostic and rational knowledge that phenomena are continually in flux between the miracles of yesterday and the commonplaces of to-morrow. This we told ourselves during the days that followed the *Narain puja*. Armand's scientific training had been no barrier to his acceptance of the faith cures of Lourdes and Ste Anne de Beaupré, though they, in effect, were magic. I had seen in dozens of Catholic shrines the piled crutches of those who had come limping upon them and cast them away when faith alone had healed their flesh. Science has never denied that psychotherapeutic cures are actual, nor could we deny the testimony either of our own senses or of those conservative investigators into the so-called magic of Tibetan Lamaism, on the northern boundary of Nepal, and of Indian yoga to the south.

Perhaps we had been tricked. That was possible, but unlikely, for not even Hospitality had known that we were going to Budanila Kantha that day. Perhaps we had imagined the miracle, but that too was unlikely, as four of us had seen precisely the same thing. Perhaps, you will say, it was mass hypnosis such as, you have been told, is practised upon the spectators of the Indian rope trick, and I as a photographer

eager to film such things am sorry to reply that there is no Indian rope trick. Mass hypnosis, furthermore, is not feasible under the conditions of our experience at the pool.

There were two disconcerting aspects of it: one, that Colonel Rand alone had not witnessed the cure, as he was outside the walls at that moment, and, two, that the child had almost immediately afterwards disappeared into the crowded street.

"Well, I've seen a yogi raise and lower the temperature of his body at will," said Armand.

"I've seen a performance of levitation that could be examined and photographed," said Roy.

"I've seen some smart work with mirrors," said Jack, chewing on the ragged butt of a Burmese cheroot he had found in his pocket.

I didn't know. I was thinking less about this marvel than about the statement Thapa had made to me yesterday. He had trembled all the way home, muttering constantly "*Narain! Narain-ab!*" and when I had treated him to a Triple Bromide he had told me nervously that my little girl might very soon die. Die horribly. There was a village to the north of Khatmandu where the sacrifice of children still occurred.

"Does the Maharajah know of this?"

"He knows very. There is nothing he can do."

"Has any white sahib seen it?"

Thapa didn't think so. White men were rarely permitted beyond the valley of Khatmandu. But he himself had seen it during the famine, and he swore by his father's head that many a child, born deformed at Budanila Kantha, had been offered as sacrifice; and always when a cure was effected by the god Narain—oh, yes, it had often happened—the child herself went to the butcher priests to lay down her body in gratitude for the healing, not of her flesh, mind you, but of her soul.

"Then you think that this girl . . ."

"I am sure, sahib. She has gone to the priests. She will be no more again."

This was not pleasant to think about at five in the morning when we set out, with all our sound equipment, to film the colossal drum we had seen in the Durbar Square. High on a pagoda balcony a boy in white was walking to and fro, beating cymbals together and chanting his praise of the god within, while a continuous procession of worshippers, also in white, entered the dark doors of the shrine. A drone as of bees came out to us, and an occasional shrill cry that unnerved me. Ecstasy in the morning was very nice, I thought, but it shouldn't be broadcast. Some of the devout in need of special boons knelt at the feet of the enormous Goddess of Terror, Khal Bhairab, who dominated the square with her fearful three eyes, waving her six arms and demanding blood.

It was this ghastly creature, I remember, who would have the blood of my little girl.

Louder and louder rang the morning gongs of worship. They bore no resemblance to the bells of our own civilization, tolling the faithful to Mass. These were harsh, mandatory; you could hear Hell in them. Our equipment was in place and we were waiting expectantly when two old men climbed to the platform where that eight-foot drum was suspended. Armand had muted the sound-recording machine and I had wrapped a flannel shirt over the microphone in preparation for the thunderous roll of it, but the gongs and cymbals and little bells in the dozen temples round about grew louder and I was not sure I was quite awake when the ancient drum beaters swung their batons, and a sound like "plmf" issued shamefully across the square.

"Plmf" went the giant drum again. "Plmf. Plmf."

"It's like beating a feather mattress with an umbrella," said Armand. "I've never heard such a putrid sound."

We turned in disgust to film the two aspects of Nepal which

we could count upon, the architectural and the human, the amazing architecture unparalleled elsewhere, and the oddly blended crowds of two contradictory religions and peoples. We made a satisfactory record, we felt, of every accessible structural form peculiar to Nepal, of windows, roofs, mortised joists, of claw-shaped cornices surmounted by gold leogryphs, while Hospitality and Thapa nearly dislocated their arms in throwing corn far up to pigeons or along pediments to pigs, so that there would be movement around our still subjects. And in the next few days we used "French film" on most of the statues which commemorated the royal family, for the sake of Hospitality's notebook and the eye of His Highness.

Among them all we filmed actually only the enormous equestrian statue of Jang Bahadur which had been brought over the mountains on the backs of men, and the two-hundred-foot tower called Bhim Sen's Folly. Though this was built to immortalize nothing more than the aspiring vanity of a man, it was important in legend, for that same Bahadur who vanquished queens and tigers bare-handed had reputedly leaped his horse from the top of this tower. The horse was killed, but Jang Bahadur was unhurt, the legend states, though it neglects to add that the tower was just twelve feet high at the time and that the ground around it had been heaped with hay. In proof of this, said Thapa, he would show us a descendant of the very same horse.

Our crowd shots were difficult in that at first there seemed no way to keep the people moving, to prevent them from standing in a concrete mass and gawking at the cameras. The amateur cinematographer often forgets or is unaware that moving pictures are precisely what their name implies, and that their film becomes intolerable when its scene becomes static. To avert this stalemate I had brought along my almost indispensable kazoo and Leila a harmonica which she could play no better than I. Hospitality be damned, said we, as we pranced through the streets like Pied Pipers tootling, while

the crowd at our heels grew from dozens to hundreds and Roy on a balcony got as lively a scene of active crowds as he could wish. They laughed themselves weak, but the cause didn't matter; no sincere expeditionary should give a whoop on a kazoo for the crowds that think him an idiot. The film's the thing.

So Leila wheezed herself bright red in the face on that ten-cent harmonica and I, stepping high, kazooed the crowd wherever Armand directed, until we had nearly emptied the markets of Khatmandu.

"Get in the car on the next lap and keep them coming," he called. "Now is our chance for a sequence in Patan."

Hospitality looked glum indeed when we crossed the Patan bridge, bounced through its gate and drove straight to the heart of it with that howling multitude from Khatmandu still following. You could see the thought that squirmed through that sceptic mind of his: for all he knew, we had nefarious designs upon Khatmandu and therefore were draining its citizens into Patan. He made an extensive note on some such matter, for wasn't it true that these two cities had always been rivals, that under separate kings they had each employed somewhat similar tactics to reduce the defending force of its enemy? What, by Siva, would the Maharajah say to this?

Patan had been a strifeful city since the thirteenth century when eight kings ruled in it, so close to one another that their eight giant wrestlers were reported to toss human heads from one kingdom to the next and so around the city like a game of medicine ball. In 1672 Pratap Malla, King of Khatmandu, and such an evil poet as would first infuriate his enemies to the point of lunacy with lampoons and then attack them, besieged Patan successfully on his way to check the aggression of Tibet at the Himalayan passes. And finally Prithwi Narayan, the indomitable, subdued and destroyed the city when he conquered all Nepal.

It is interesting to note that the capture of Patan was

effected in 1768 by methods almost identical with those of Hitler in 1940. During an Indra Jatra festival in honour of the god of rain, when the city was swarming with celebrants, Prithwi Narayan insinuated into it some six hundred Brahmans, skilled as warriors and expert at propaganda. They remained unnoticed at the conclusion of the fête, but slyly they spread word of Narayan's invincible armies, so weakening the morale of the people that on the eve of the attack their king, Tez Ner Sing, when he found himself alone in defence because of the six hundred Brahman Fifth Columnists, surrendered the city without a struggle.

The treasures of Patan were plundered, the nobles all massacred and unspeakable brutalities practised upon the wretched citizenry. The King was chained to the broiling gilt roof of the Machendranath temple and forced to witness the demolition of most of his splendid Buddhist shrines. Amidst these barbarities, however, Prithwi Narayan performed one act of strange benevolence for which the historian must be grateful : he spared the life of Father Giuseppe, whose *Asiatic Researches*, published in 1799, gave us the first account of Nepal. This amazing Capuchin evangelist, hero of my childhood, was a sort of Prester John who after travelling through China and Tibet established a small mission at Patan and devoted himself as much to ethnological research as to religion. He was present at the sacking of Khatmandu and Patan, and so won the respect of Prithwi Narayan because of his courage in dressing the wounded of both armies in the midst of battle that he was permitted to retire to India. Father Giuseppe was the first and the last Christian missionary to visit Nepal.

Khatmandu and Bhatgaon are vitally alive to-day, but Patan, the lovely Lalita Patan as it was first named by Asoka, has never recovered from its defeat. Everywhere you glance you see the ruins of war and time, mutilated sculptures, fine gates collapsed, temples whose once glorious finial umbrellas hang in a snarl of rusted iron. The stone idols are split apart; and

moss grows on them now, as if a compassionate god had tried to soothe the wounds with this green bandage. As late as the latter nineteenth century, during the ambassadorship of Brian Hodgson, the streets were so cluttered with holy rubble, with Buddhas, bells, temple friezes, that to walk in them required care lest you defile these relics.

But the great square, the Durbar, still retains some semblance of its past glory. The lofty five-storeyed temple named Deo-Talli rises from its centre in a fair state of preservation, though it has not for years been regilt and repainted as have the similar temples of Bhatgaon. Here and there are memorial pillars to kings or generals, sometimes to a fantastic winged god, the Garuda. Pagoda roofs rise in diminishing piles on every side, and the soft pastel colours of their intricately amorous struts are warmed to life by the evening sun. "Picturesque," that dilettante word, is, I suppose, the best adjective to describe this ruinous medley, but it is more than that. There are dignity and a sophisticated splendour in the dilapidated square of Patan.

Sylvain Levi, writing of it in 1894, observed: "*La place du darbar est une merveille qui défie la description; sous la vive clarté d'un ciel qui n'éblouit pas, le palais royal étale sa façade ouvragée, sculptée, bariolée à plaisir, où les ors, les bleus, les rouges éclairent le ton sombre des boiseries; vis-à-vis, comme enfanté par un caprice d'artiste, un monde de pierre rayonnant de blancheur, piliers que couronnent des images de bronze, colonnades ajourées, temples de rêves, légers et frêles, sous la garde d'une armée de chimères et de griffons.*" And this old philologist was not one to squander words.

Narrow lanes radiate in all directions from the central square through lesser squares and *tols* towards those sites in the circle of the ancient walls where gateways formerly stood, and where a few are standing at the present day. Most of the *tols* are built around a temple or a column or a sacred peepul tree in the shade of which the Indian and Tibetan traders exchange their wares. Here you will always find a saffron salesman,

sitting in the golden pool left by the powdery overflow of his basket ; from head to toe, skin and gown, he is a brilliant yellow. Here those rare Buddhist nuns, with shaven pates, will be chattering, if they leave their convents at all, and two or three tough little Gurkha soldiers will nonchalantly be raising and dropping their spindles—a most unmartial pursuit—as they spin their wives' yarn. And you think of the practical wives humouring these bad boy husbands of theirs whose greatest desire is to be in the army, though they never, probably, will see a war. If you play such idle games, they'll say, here's the spinning to do.

It is a gentle occupation, that of soldiery in Nepal during times of peace, but you are reminded of the fierceness in the hearts of these little men when you see on all sides the effigy of Hanuman, their monkey god. Here he will be crouching on a low pedestal, gross, sottish, featureless, for his face has been smeared with vermilion ointments until there is nothing but the baboon-like form of its muzzle for the fanatics to caress. And here, in bas-relief, he will be snarling and waving four arms while with two others he will be tearing the entrails from the victim on his lap.

And such is now the anomalous state of religion in Nepal that God Hanuman of the Hindus will often be found sculptured upon the walls of the peaceful Buddhist *vihars*, the monasteries, making a mockery of the kindness and charity which this most innocent of philosophies enjoins. There are fifteen large *vihars* in Patan, and over a hundred small ones, all more or less alike in architectural characteristics. They are two-storeyed, built of burnt red brick, with massive wooden window-frames and doorways and overhanging tiled roofs. Both brick and wood are profusely carved to depict the symbols of two mythologies. The fifteen large *vihars* are built in quadrangular shape around the most important Buddhist temples of Nepal, but few monks live in them now. The temple guardians, the associate priests, will have a room or

two ; another will be devoted to the paraphernalia of those gods who are paraded during the festivals ; and the rest of the monastery will usually be found inhabited by craftsmen of the Newar and Banhra tribes who have quartered each of their guilds separately in the monasteries.

By far the most interesting of these great crumbling edifices is that which is called the Unko Vihar. It extends in a square over an area as large, I should say, as half a New York City block in the "fifties," one vast apartment leading to another by crooked passages which were easily defended in the old days, with dark little rooms opening from these passages and themselves communicating by secret doors. In the central courtyard is such a jumble of brass and bronze and copper images as to take your breath away ; row upon row of Buddhas, Bodhisatvas, Garudas, stone scaffolds with great bronze bells swinging like hunchbacks, altars with gilt thunderbolts awaiting the hand of Indra to hurl them at moving picture people from the far, infidel West. This is the most popular resthouse for the Tibetan Lamas who come over the slopes of Mount Everest and through the four-mile-high passes to visit the Nepal valley during the winter pilgrimage.

To us, however, the strangest and most extraordinary buildings of Patan lay just outside the city, the four *chaityas*, or mound-temples, built at the four cardinal points by Asoka, King of Northern India, in the third century B.C. A fifth, in ruins now, he placed as a hub for the great city of Lalita Patan which he was to build.

According to local tradition this Buddhist King Asoka came to Nepal on a pilgrimage to visit the temple of Swayambhunath and the shrine of Gujeshuri at Pashupattinath. He was accompanied by his daughter and a great retinue of servants. He performed his devotions piously, took the throne of Khatmandu away from King Stunko, married off his daughter to a Nepalese noble, and to commemorate these accomplishments built the *chaityas* of Patan, just as throughout India he had

similarly celebrated his piety and munificence by monuments on which were inscribed his own wise words and those of Buddha, his Lord.

Satisfied with these achievements, temporal and religious, Asoka returned to his capital in the province of Magadha, or modern Behar. But his daughter found marriage irksome and divorced her husband, in the common way, by simply leaving a split betel nut in his bed and wandering off. She became a Bhikshuni or nun and founded a convent in the neighbourhood of Pashupattinath.

The mound-temples of Asoka are nearly identical. Each consists of a hemispherical base of concrete, like half an apple, from which springs a short four-sided pyramid of solid brickwork, culminating in the Lingam which represents both the Sivaite phallus—despite the Buddhist intent of the temple—and the sacred Joti or flame of Adi Buddha, “the One Sole and Supreme God, in Himself, the First Cause of All, the Creator and Preserver of the Universe.” Round the base of each temple are the shrines of the lesser Buddhas, and in the heart of the concrete hemisphere is the usual chamber containing images and, probably—judging by excavations of similar *garbhs* in India—historical records of Asoka. As the temples of Patan have never been opened and would, indeed, be defended against the archæologist by Buddhist and Hindu alike, it is fascinating to speculate upon the records which were sealed within them three hundred years before the birth of Christ, particularly because we know that Asoka was one of the most articulate and accurate kings of that ancient time.

We were, I repeat, an honourable expedition, but it was hard indeed to resist the temptation to come here on some dark night, when the burghers of Patan had shuttered themselves in from the aerial fiends and the guards were sleepily spinning their good wives’ wool, when a chisel alone would have opened the cracks of these temples that were over two thousand years old, and unquestionably reveal the roots of the strangest

culture in Asia. Old ghosts, decrepit with confinement, might blither at us, but their hearts would be stuffed with the secrets of this land on the roof of the world.



Journey into Fear 31

ARMAND, WHOSE GLASSES were nearly opaque with dust, was meticulously polishing the Akeley's four-inch lens when Thapa, who should have been polishing the wind-shield, came up to me and said :

" Sahib, the priests have her now. This is old in fashion and bad, very, very."

" Tell Sahib Denis," I said.

Thapa bowed so low and so close to Armand that a lock of his greasy hair flicked the lens. Armand looked hard at Thapa and harder at me. " I heard it. See what you can do, Dave, if you feel it's worth it. But be discreet, will you ? " He held the lens to the setting sun and patiently repolished it.

I thought of the child with the paralytic leg at the pool of Narain, of the miraculous cure we had witnessed, of Thapa's unqualified assertion that my little girl had gone to the butcher priests to lay down her poor body in gratitude for the cure of her crippled soul. The horror of it chilled my bones again, but there came with it the purging fury that decided me to try somehow to help this youngster, so long as Armand would take the chance of my involving the expedition. We were film producers, not Galahads, professionally, but be damned to the film in a case like this.

I set out alone with Thapa, for the two of us might pass unnoticed through the thickening dusk whereas the expedition in a mass would be heralded a mile ahead. Gaokarran was our destination, a village on the Baghmatti River some ten miles

north. We stopped to buy mangoes and *chupattis* at the Durbar bazaar, then turned into the smaller, unlighted roads that skirted the Maharajah's palace and the British Residency. A silhouette at the living-room window showed me that Mrs. Rand was working on another of her lonely picture puzzles.

"Keep in the dark," Thapa whispered as we took the road above Pashupatti, the town of the dead where we had had the trouble with the monkeys. I kept in the dark indeed. I huddled into my shirt for fear of recognition by the Hindu fanatics who now would cheerfully have taken any of the expedition to their sacred burning ghats, and cheerfully have left him there, for good. One great fire was burning over some contented corpse, and its light flickered fitfully on the bronze gilt door behind it. Huge red sparks dropped into the river and yellow sparks came up to meet them.

We followed the edge of the gorge above the cliffs where the hermits lived. A shameful cry came up from the depths beneath us, a cry of defeat, perhaps, from some young *saddhu* whose mortification of the flesh had been too much for him. God help him, I thought; he was not aware that no matter how ingenious and terrible the physical trial he had endured, it would not compare with the agony of mind now that he had surrendered. I could imagine the other holy men writhing on their beds of nails because of him, or beating their heads in shame against the jagged rock of their caves. Death would be better for him.

"*Chupatti?*" Thapa whispered. We munched on that culinary cardboard while carefully feeling our way down a road that was corduroyed by buffalo cart tracks. Bats whirred up from the gorge to our right and spiralled madly, twittering, about our heads. A great bobbin of a moon rose over Mount Gaurisankar, laying a thread of gold along its snowy peak, and I was afraid we would be recognized by peasants who might peer from the occasional mud-and-manure huts along the way, but a cloud slipped towards it as it rose, then another and

another from all directions in the sky, as if the moon were magnetically attracting them, and soon we were walking in the purple dark again.

"She will be at the *vihar*," Thapa said, "waiting until the gods give a sign."

What I should do about this, I hadn't the least idea. Ten years ago I should have gladly climbed through any harem or convent window. Twenty years from now, desperate for departed adventures, I might do the same; but not to-night. Hell, I thought, was I going to let the expedition down? More than likely, I thought in answer; almost undoubtedly I was.

I had not realized that we were following the river bank until the skirl of waters told me that we had descended to them again. The hills on each side were closing in. We seemed to be walking into the earth when the second gorge, the Gorge of Gaokarran, rose gradually around us.

"*Narain . . . Narain-ab . . .*" Thapa murmured, and prickles went along my spine when I thought that it was just possible that in these Himalayan sanctuaries there might actually exist the fiends which reason had banished from the outside world. Thapa held to my shirt sleeve, and I lifted my chin and said, as Jack might, but so loudly that it startled me, "Nuts!"

The moon slipped over a rent in the clouds and a green light settled bit by bit into the gorge, like a coin teetering as it sinks in water. Two things I saw in that moment of luminance, the whitened knee of a man floating down from the ghats of Gaokarran, and, on the cliff beside me, a glittering eye about ten inches long. There was no escaping it; the painted eye of Buddha watched our every move. The moon went in; we rounded a bend in the river and suddenly saw the lights of Gaokarran.

Connected by a sharply arched bridge, the village lay on both sides of the river, pressed between the water and the walls

of the gorge which towered over it, a village such as Doré might well have used for his entrance to Dante's *Inferno*. The houses, like most in Nepal, were of two or more storeys, but these seemed unusually tall and narrow, perhaps because of the shadows on them. Large Coleman or Primus lanterns set on balconies outlined sharply the silhouettes of dragons, lizards, leogryphs, with which the struts were ornamented, and threw a pale cold light against the rocky cliffs.

Only a few children and an old fakir with an enormous naked paunch were on the streets bordering the river. Most of the villagers seemed to be in the monastery which Thapa pointed out, for a great clashing of cymbals and a howling of wooden horns and flutes seemed to come from there. Quietly we approached, hugging the cliff, passing behind the houses, until we reached a shadowed place where we were somewhat concealed but none the less could get a partial view of the monastery court through a grilled window and the open door beyond it. The court was filled with people. Mostly they were spectators to a violent dance performed by young men round an image of Khal Bhairab which seemed a slightly smaller replica of the one in the Durbar Square at Khatmandu, a black leering goddess, her arms raised in menace, her bloody feet mashing the life from the same very contented-looking demon. The light flickered on the skulls she wore as girdle and necklace. All the men had staves and were clacking them furiously together as they circled the terrible goddess, brandishing them in the air and clacking them together again, more or less in time to the music of the orchestra. The scene would have been less terrifying if the faces of the dancers had been less fine, if they had resembled the gross Africans, for instance. But these were sensitive, spirited, intelligent, despite the frenzied dance and its obvious dedication to a goddess of terror and death.

Perhaps we were too late, I thought, and turned to speak to Thapa. He was gone. I saw him a moment later, unobtru-

sively mingling with the crowd in the court, speaking casually to one man and another. Now, by God, what was this? Could he be an informer? Was all his frankly proffered information just a bait to draw us out? Had His Highness felt, perhaps, that since Hospitality's overt spying had produced small results, the subtle Thapa might be more effective?

I'd been a fool, all right, to let myself in for this, alone in a remote and hostile village. Still I was here; I'd stick it. If that ten-year-old girl wasn't afraid of Khal Bhairab, I wasn't either, much. I turned to get my bearings, in case there should be trouble, and heard a groan almost at my feet. I moved back into the shadow, shivering. My hand tangled in the pocket where the brass knuckles lay. There was another groan, a few yards away this time. I clutched the flashlight, fumbled for the button, clicked it on.

Lying on the jagged rocks were two figures which I scarcely recognized as living men, for they were trussed like chickens, their legs tied up behind them, their arms bent back and their heads pulled almost to touch their toes by ropes looped into their mouths. This acted as a gag. Both men were nearly nude, their bodies swollen and gashed where they had squirmed over the sharp points of rock, but they were alive.

Suddenly my flashlight went out as a hand closed over it, and I jumped back against the wall. It was Thapa. He leaned close to my ear and spat in it as he whispered:

"Don't light! I could not learn from them. They are Gurungs; I am Gurkha. No good. One man say she not come. Another say, yes, she come but not see the priests yet. Another say she not cured, her leg sick again. What you say, 'Nuts'?"

"Right. Nuts!" said I. "Why are these men tied up?"

"Punishment," said Thapa. "*Dak* runners (mail runners) who have not run fast enough but stop. Always they punish like this. All day in sun, all night in rain maybe. Two days,

two nights they stay like this. It is sad, but they run fast next time."

For a second I flashed on the light again and saw that both these poor wretches had the belled bamboo mail tubes tied to their wrists. Their eyes were clenched with pain and ropy saliva hung from their tortured mouths. Thapa pulled me away, but not before I had dropped my knife near them. I heard the tinkle of a bell as we crawled through the shadows to the path.

The river was beside us again, the gorge widening.

"Now, look Thapa, what do *you* think about this girl? What do you *know*?"

"I know she is here, somewhere. A *guru* at Budanila Kantha told me. He knows."

My Samaritanism was weakening by the minute and I was developing a great enthusiasm for about three fingers of Scotch and bed. After all, I had lived in many countries whose ways were strange to me and revolting as they had sometimes been. I had so far had the good sense not to interfere. But damn it, this was a child . . .

"Look out!" Thapa yelled.

Down the gorge came a clattering and bumping as if half the hill had broken away. Where we had stood ten seconds ago there landed a boulder as big as my head.

"Monkeys?" I asked, in an amazing falsetto.

Thapa was running too fast to reply. I kept up with him. The blessed moon came out again when we reached the hill-top, and it shone in the wild eyes of the lad when at last he answered.

"Nuts!" said he.



September 3, 1939**32**

IT WAS LATE in the evening of September 3, 1939, that we sat around the hospitable fireplace of Colonel and Mrs. Rand. The short wave radio was bringing news from London, a form of magic that made the healing of crippled children as comparatively unimpressive as a sleight with cards. We heard the booming of Big Ben across all of Europe and half of Asia, across the deserts of Turkistan and the Himalayan snows. The white usurper might be kept in person from Nepal, but nothing could intercept this aerial magic.

"Boong!" came the note of the world's most famous clock. "Boong . . . boong . . ." Mrs. Rand's eyes were misty as she looked towards England, through the mountains Nanda Devi and Nanga Parbat, five miles high.

"Mr. Neville Chamberlain," said the radio announcer, as intimately as if he were in the dining-room.

Colonel Rand's face hardened suddenly. There were straight lines around his mouth now; none at the corners of his eyes.

"I haven't told you, because I didn't want to distress you," he said, "but I had a message in code this morning from Delhi, from the Viceroy. I get such messages regularly, over the same wireless. But this morning's news was frightful. You will probably hear it now."

He refreshed our glasses, grimly, while we listened to Chamberlain, while we heard of England's entry into the war.

When the telephone rang suddenly at two a.m., it was like the scream of a shell through our conversation. We had forgotten there were telephones in this unworldly place.

Colonel Rand returned to the room with something of a smile around his taut lips. "Let's forget Hitler," he said. "I have a little good news for you, Mr. Denis. That was the Maharajah's secretary calling to say that His Highness will

receive you to-morrow. The full expedition, at the Palace, ten o'clock."

Yes, it was good news, but it seemed pretty trivial now.

"Thanks. Fine," said Armand, staring at the radio. His parents lived in Brussels.

"It does seem extraordinary to have telephones here," Mrs. Rand, catching the eye of her husband, remarked. "Won't anyone have a freshener?"

"Thanks," said Armand. "Fine."

"They were only installed a few years before we came here. Telephones, I mean. It was rather amusing, apparently. The Maharajah imported a man from India to do the work. Only the palaces and the homes of the generals were connected, of course. On the day when they were first to be tried out His Highness sent a command to every general, instructing him to be at the 'phone at three sharp in the afternoon, to await his telephone call. His Highness, of course, had been in England and knew how to use a telephone, but the generals did not. They waited in their homes in fear and trembling for the voice of their master, the Lord of Life and Death, to deign to speak to them, an extraordinary honour, for His Highness usually communicates with them through his A.D.C.s. There they sat, each one in a dither at his telephone, trying to remember the instructions for the use of it that had been sent him.

"At three o'clock the palace cannon was fired. The Maharajah, surrounded by awed attendants, picked up the 'phone and said 'Hello!' Everyone waited nervously for the answer from the Commander-in-Chief at the other end. But there was no answer. 'Hello, hello!' said the Maharajah. Still no answer.

"His Highness, in a towering rage, immediately dispatched two guards to the home of the unlucky Commander-in-Chief who had dared to ignore him. He tried another officer. 'Hello, hello!' But there was no answer there either. Two more guards were sent to bring in that poor man. The little

Indian engineer who had installed the 'phones attempted to slip from the room at this point, but at a nod from the Maharajah he was seized and taken to the cells.

"By now His Highness was bellowing into the telephone, trying to reach one general after another, and one by one all the generals of the Nepalese army were being brought, in fear of their lives, to the palace. I don't doubt but that there would have been another famous massacre if His Highness's intelligent grandson, Nara, hadn't carefully questioned both the generals and the guards who had brought them in. The generals swore that they had been waiting at the telephone at the appointed time. The guards vouched for them. There each of them sat, they said, holding the receiver to his ear and waiting for his master's voice. The generals spluttered; they had heard nothing, nothing at all.

"That was the solution to it, of course. They had all been so frightened of missing the Voice that they had grabbed the receiver the moment the cannon was discharged, so of course the lines were busy and no connection could be made. It was a narrow squeak for our fine generals. We muffle our 'phone when they visit us now. They may be the toughest little fighting men in the world, but the ringing of a telephone bell nearly scares them to death."

"His Highness sounds like an ogre," said Leila.

"Not a bit of it. He's a dear. It is largely due to him and the amazing discipline he has effected in Nepal that you find the country in such an extraordinary state of mechanical, if not cultural, development. We respect him enormously, and are truly fond of him."

"He has been a long time," I said, "in giving us permission to see him. When we do go to-morrow I know Armand will manage the diplomatic niceties to perfection, but I have my own problem. I want to do a book on this amazing country and I need some official help. If he's not sympathetic it is going to be awkward. What interests him most?"

"Nepal," Colonel Rand replied. "His own people. And that has nothing at all to do with the fabulous personal income which he derives from them, nearly a million pounds a year. The coolie may never see him, but, like God, His Highness knows the coolie's every thought, and really works for his betterment. If you run dry on the subject of Nepal try big game hunting. All of you shoot, I suppose?"

There was that embarrassing question again. We had been worsted by it often in British India where not to shoot was not to be quite men.

"None of us like to shoot," Armand replied, "excepting Jack, and he may get over it before the expedition is done. I simply see no fun in shooting for what is called sport. It's obvious that we all love danger and adventure or we wouldn't be doing what we do, but personally, I had my fill of shooting in the last war, and Dave here, who used to make a living out of the gold watches he fought for in car barns, so he says, apparently boxed the murder out of his system. What hunting people never think of is that it takes a great deal more 'guts' to face a tiger or an elephant at twenty feet with a camera than it does to shoot him at three hundred yards. That must be obvious. We're protected by guns, of course, but an animal to us is much more valuable alive on film than dead on the library wall. When we get to Africa we'll be photographing big game, lion, rhino, elephant, at close quarters that would give most of your fox hunters fits. Why, we've filmed lions from a distance of ten feet! And with only one gun amongst us. Dave, of course, carries his brass knuckles in case of emergency."

All right, all right, I thought, remembering the service of those beloved knuckles in a bar-room at Fiji, under a bed in Batavia, in a bazaar fight at Aleppo. It was unfair to asperse my knuckles, even though I had forgotten them during the monkey battle, and once I had used them effectively to open a can of milk for Leila. I should explain that this faithful tool

was not the emasculated American variety ; it was French, with spikes protruding from every knuckle. I loved it dearly.

To our astonishment Colonel Rand agreed with Armand. "But that's no good as a conversational wedge with the Maharajah," he laughed. "Talk gore to him. Ask him about his rhino and tiger. You might admire the paternalism he shows in protecting the villagers from tigers by shooting them, though there's no need to inquire why the villagers and even the soldiers are expressly forbidden to shoot the beasts themselves. He really is a great hunter, you know, if you'll permit the phrase. I think I told you that he shot one hundred and thirty-five tiger during a month last year. He almost literally takes rhino—the most savage in the world, the *Sumatrensis*—by the horns, and he captures elephants alive. With the help of two or three hundred natives, of course."

"Sport, eh?" said Roy.

Colonel Rand chewed on his pipe, upside-down. "Well, you know, it used to be, in Jang Bahadur's time. They used to lasso wild elephants, actually. Jang lassoed several and brought them in tied between his own elephant and another tame one. The Terai, the swampy hunting ground, was such a hellish place with its beasts and its *awal* fever and its wild men—they used to catch these in cage traps, for slaves—that they took nautch girls to perform for them every night, and imported champagne which they would wrap in wet towels and give to the elephants to swing gently till it was cooled. I must say that His Present Highness used to shoot tiger when they were driven into a ring of tame elephants ; he'd ride right in and pop them off ; but recently he has been setting up a canvasring inside the elephant ring and shooting from outside."

"Tut, tut," said Jack.

"I've just heard that he is now going to give up hunting forever. Don't quite know why. But he'd been having all sorts of reverses. About a year ago a 'must' elephant, a sexually crazy rogue, charged through the Maharajah's camp

when he was after rhino. It was a serious matter, for the Hindus can't shoot an elephant, as their god Ganesh has an elephant's head. So this savage brute had to be *shooed* away. Quite a job it was. The camp was wrecked and three mahouts killed. The creed doesn't say anything about letting mahouts be killed."

What a film that would make, I was thinking shamelessly.

"But the worst of all occurred on the shoot last March. It was evening and His Highness thought he saw a rhino getting ready to charge. So he shot at it, and it turned out to be a cow, a bovine cow. He had killed it, a cow, mind you, the holiest thing in the Hindu world. If Mount Everest had fallen it could have caused no more horror among the people. There were riots in the streets, and when the troops were called out they rioted too. I was on the *maidan* when the high priest of Pashupatti confronted that savage mob. It wasn't that they would even think of harming the Maharajah, you understand. They simply believed that Indra would bounce a thunderbolt into Nepal and blow them to bits. Their souls too; that was the rub."

Another magnificent scene, I was thinking; and so was Armand, apparently. Damn it, we were always out of season!

"But the high priest quieted them with a gesture. Then he announced that the Maharajah, in reparation to the gods, would give to the temple of Pashupattinath a life-sized cow whose body should be made of copper gilt, its horns and tail of solid gold, its hoofs and udders of silver, its eyes studded with rubies and the tip of its tail with pearls. A thousand people sighed with relief and awe.

"So the Maharajah, who had not been consulted at all, was forced by his duty to god and man to visit the jewellers and ascertain the value of this marvellous, synthetic cow. It was a staggering sum, as you can imagine, but he quickly turned it over to the temple, thus obviating any vulgar demand by the priests for actual cash. The cow was never built, of course,

but the sin was expiated. I'm not sure, after all, that it would really be the best thing to mention big game hunting to His Highness to-morrow. . . . Look here, don't go. There'll be more news from . . . Well, good luck to you then."



The \$1,000,000 Hat 33

AT SIX IN the morning, after three hours' sleep, I was wakened by a sound like that of escaping steam. I pawed my way through the tangled mosquito netting and saw that Jack and Roy were both up on their elbows listening. There came a small explosive sound like "O!" then another steamy emission followed in a moment by the dissyllable "orry."

"Sure enough," said Roy. "It's Hospitality."

"Sssso ssssorry," said Hospitality, leaning through the window and twitching recklessly at Jack's net. "You must be ready. It is the Day . . ." He backed out suddenly as Jack's great foot moved deliberately towards him. After two hours more of sleep we rose, bathed standing in basins, ate a breakfast of rice and eggs and put on the linen suits that had been freshly pressed for the occasion. We were a dapper-looking expedition with the exception of my trousers which had been pressed crosswise like sailor pants. I had entrusted them to Thapa, who knew a *dhobi* immeasurably better than the one we had been employing. It was too late now.

Through the streets of Khatmandu and round and round the market we roared to the accompaniment of a fine fanfare on the horn as Thapa announced that this was a royal mission we were set upon. Hospitality beamed and bowed to right and left.

"Hoi!" yelled Armand, tapping Thapa with the gold snuff-box he was bringing to the Maharajah. "Straighten it out!"

We straightened out at fifty miles an hour, which was the noise limit of that ancient Dodge, and in a few minutes were being saluted by half a troop of soldiers at the Palace gate. Hospitality kept right on bowing and I kept thinking of those flattened trousers in regard to the prestige of the expedition. They were a public scandal, I judged by Armand's eyes when he looked at them twice and turned hopelessly away.

Up the marble steps we walked, the trousers flapping, and down the long colonnaded porch, Armand and Leila first, moving with poise and dignity, then Roy and Jack with me between them feeling like a bow-legged sailor. I sought desperately to revise the scholarly appeal with which I had planned to beseech official aid for my projected story of Nepal. Unless I could talk through a window it would sound silly any way I put it.

The door was opened for us by a colossally turbaned Gurkha. We were led to a broad staircase panelled with a poster-type mural depicting at a length of sixty feet the courage of Jang Bahadur on an occasion when he was thrown from his elephant and had to shoot the tiger as it leaped over his head. In front of this on the middle landing stood a stately old man, beautifully dressed in European clothes and wearing a modest medal of some sort in his lapel. As we had not seen even a photograph of His Highness we had a moment of indecision as to whether this was he, come half-way, in a democratic fashion, to meet us. He shook hands all around.

"How do you do?" he said. He walked beside Leila up the stairs. "A good journey?"

Bright flunkies made way for us as we entered a sumptuous reception room. (Flap-flap, went the trousers.)

"His Highness the Maharajah of Nepal," announced the old man who had welcomed us, His Highness's secretary. The Maharajah came forward from the end of that immense and amazing room. Slowly he passed the great fountain that was made entirely of crystal. Slowly he passed the grand-

father clock that also was made entirely of crystal, works and all. He had seemed haughty, arrogant, when we saw him upon his elephant a few weeks ago, but now he was benignity at its simplest. The patent leather shoes with cloth tops and buttons, the tight Nepalese trousers, the visored station-master's cap with its brooch of diamonds and rubies not quite in the middle of it, the old-fashioned gold bifocals, effused a comfortable atmosphere, not at all what I had imagined at the prospect of confronting one of the wealthiest and holiest men in the world: the Lieutenant-General His Highness (Ojaswi Rajanya Projjwala Sri Sri Sri) Maharajah Joodha Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Honorary Colonel of all the Gurkha Rifle Regiments of the Indian Army, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal.

The secretary introduced us and His Highness shook our hands in the Indian fashion, high and with a little jerk.

"How do you do?" said he also. "A good journey?" His false teeth were perfectly made for smiling.

He led Leila to a red velvet love seat in the centre of the room and sat beside her, while the rest of us followed (flap-flap-flap, I went; if I could have done a hornpipe I should have been more at ease) to a long row of chairs placed at right angles to them. On the other side and parallel to us sat the secretary, three high officers, and one of the Maharajah's legitimate sons attired in jodhpurs and the sort of loudly checked racecourse jacket which my wife has never permitted me to wear.

It was a desultory conversation, transmitted through the son and the secretary. First His Highness had some difficulty in establishing who was the Roosevelt, Armand or Leila, and then which of his own daughters had sent us to Nepal. He had forgotten already, there were so many of them. What was her name, the Princess?

Leila passed this buck to Armand and Armand to me. The question whirled through a maelstrom of exotic names, clicking

and caroming away again, sinking into my desperate memory, until at last it came to rest against its answer.

"Saya Mala," I said. "Saya Mala Chowdree. Would Your Highness . . . ?"

But His Highness was looking happily at Leila and smiling in reminiscence. Yes, he remembered, it seemed.

Armand was talking now of the miracles of burden-carrying performed by the Nepalese coolies. Surely the healthiest people in the world, he said. The stamina of a nation should be judged by its meanest citizen.

The answer came circuitously back to us. Yes, when His Highness was in Milan he was impressed by the loads the peasants carried, so he encouraged it in Nepal. The people would be grateful one day, he said.

Did His Highness by any chance know, Leila asked, the Khan of Kalat, whom she had visited when she drove a truck around the world? He was the fattest man in Baluchistan and the strongest, a champion weight-lifter.

His Highness knew him indeed, but did she know the Lama Wangdi who could lift a man by his ears, without the ears coming off? That was really remarkable. And had she heard of the nun called the Thunderbolt Sow, the strongest woman in India fifty years ago, and almost as greatly revered as the Dalai Lama?

Yes, we knew the legends of this real but fantastic creature.

Had we heard that when her Buddhist convent was attacked by Mohammedans the Thunderbolt Sow had smeared herself and all the nuns with pig fat, thus saving their virtue from the porcophobiatic invaders? Three hundred pigs she had herself flung upon them from the convent walls.

"Your Highness," I said, "would . . . ?"

But His Highness was on his feet now, and still talking of weight-lifting as he led us through one wing of the palace. The next huge room was a simple frame for two throne chairs which were upholstered in cretonne plush, if that is imaginable.

The room beyond was small but memorable for the array of Major-Generals whom the Maharajah introduced to us as his sons, but if there was a day's difference of age among them I couldn't detect it. It was a very neat row of sons.

On the mantelpiece were photographs of Kings and Rajahs, above the affected signatures of Kings and the clean simple Sanscrit of Rajahs who were wise enough and generous enough to use the script still customary in Nepal. In the midst of them, but back a bit, was a sleek portrait of Adolf Hitler, signed in ink, and dated 14 January, 1938. It would now be interesting to know what Adolf Hitler was doing upon that day.

The sons of the Maharajah, parallel as pickets, moved towards me as I was trying to remember Hitler's date without making an obvious note; they wanted to shake hands with me, but they did not smile. So I flapped away in my damned sailor trousers after Armand and Leila and Jack and Roy who had followed the Maharajah into the next amazing room.

The light was dazzling here, blaring like trumpets from every corner, blasting from wall to wall and so violently into my eyes that I raised them to the ceiling for relief and there saw a congregation of plaster angels, flat on their backs against it, smirking. Surrounding the room were a dozen caricatures of Armand who stood in the middle of it, for the walls were inlaid with carnival mirrors, the monstrous mirrors that pervert your body to that of a dwarf, a skeleton, a hyperthyroid, always an idiot, but the Maharajah was in the shadow of the hall beyond. Leila flicked from mirror to mirror, swelled and diminished, grew two heads where one should be, and I stood stock-still to observe at last how my trousers should have been pressed.

All this was distressing enough, in the chambers of a Maharajah, without the circular iron staircase, like a fire escape exactly, which corkscrewed into the ceiling between the shins of two cherubim.

The Maharajah's flashy son approached Armand from all sides through those dizzying mirrors.

"You will please pose for His Highness now," he said.

That is one way to take photographs of the mighty; you pose for them behind your cameras; you are the butt of the action, not they. Similarly when I once sought an audience with Father Divine he replied (through the pious and luscious white secretary whose knitted sweater was much too tight for her) that *he* would interview *me*.

Leila asked with her most engaging smile whether it would be possible to film His Highness in the extraordinary helmet which everyone had heard of, though less than a hundred Europeans had ever seen. It is intrinsically the most valuable headdress in the world, I believe, and is said to be insured by Lloyds for the equivalent of one million dollars in rupees.

The son said he thought we might film it. He would speak to his father. If we would wait a few minutes he would accompany us to the Thuni Khel, or big parade ground, where we might pose for the troops.

"That's luck," Roy grunted as we walked back past the photo of Hitler, the cretonne thrones, the crystal fountain, and the solid crystal clock which was inscribed:

"Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori."

"That," said Armand, "means 'The Duce decorated the Moors in the name of the Fatherland.'"

When we reached the parade ground the Maharajah had already arrived, accoutred in khaki and astride a magnificent stallion. We set up our cameras and sound equipment beneath the enormous tree which for centuries had been the court of the early Rajahs. The Maharajah cantered past, while we busily posed for him, but we posed even better with our colour cameras when his favourite son, Nara Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana, who had solved the telephone problem, galloped up in a uniform of bright scarlet and black, wearing a fine feathered helmet and sitting a saddle of golden leopard

skin. Cannon were fired ; the band played, of all tunes, " It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and across our finders marched and re-marched two thousand troops. They may have been great fighting men but they were very poor paraders, and would be particularly unimpressive on film because they filed past in ranks of four. What we besought was a solid mass of them, a body of colour and organized action, but it was impossible to obtain, for they had been trained to march in narrow ranks so that they could climb the ribbony trails of the mountains.

Nara Shum Sher rode into the midst of us so fast that I tangled in my flat trousers while trying at the same moment to get this action photograph and to get away from him. He announced that we might now pose for His Highness in the museum. Away he went and away went the Maharajah beside him, posting so high that I could see the horse's head through his crotch. As quickly as we could we packed our bulky and delicate equipment and drove to the " museum " in the faithful Dodge.

We were led to the back door, the tradesmen's entrance, I should judge it, and followed the secretary into a galleried hall which was surrounded by life-size oil paintings of the royal family. They were made in curious ways, some with house paint, apparently, some with the paint piled in spikes half an inch long so they might catch all the light there was in that dim hall and the better represent diamond buttons. Three, which Leila pointed out, nodding her head seriously and appreciatively, had photographic prints of faces pasted upon the painted necks.

An abattoir of hunting trophies lined the walls. One in particular caught our attention, the head of a gigantic rhinoceros which sat, like St. John's, upon a golden platter, for the back side of it had been sculptured and painted to depict all the gory innards which were seen when it had been amputated.

The secretary smiled when we admired it with constricted throats. In the cellar, he said, were heads and skins of animals

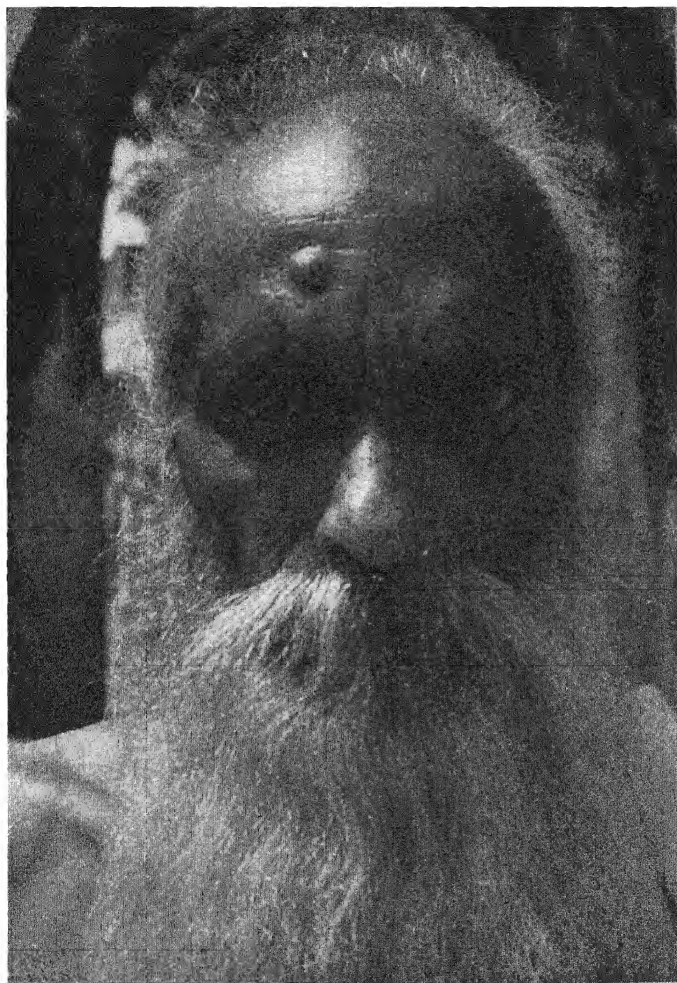
piled four *guz* (four yards) high and weighing twenty *maunds* (1,640 pounds). The Maharajah had killed them all.

A strip of sunlight lay diagonally across the floor. It widened slowly and we turned to see the front doors opening. Between them, flanked by sons, stood the Maharajah, now wearing a dark blue suit to which was affixed a row of medals. The sudden sunlight revealed splendour in what had seemed little less grim than a waxworks gallery before. At the end of the room stood another pair of thrones—they seemed to be everywhere, ready for quick dealings—and marble columns grew like huge stalagmites from the sunlit floor to taper into the darkness of the high ceiling. A carpet of red velvet interwoven with gold thread lay before the thrones, and a tiger skin with jewelled eyes was spread before the door.

It was not this magnificence that held our eyes, however. It was the helmet, that great treasure of Nepal, which an orderly was passing to His Highness. He put it into Leila's hands while we all prayed she would have the strength not to let one million dollars' worth of frangible jewellery fall. She passed it back like a hot potato, and the Maharajah put it on, without a word, as befitted one's conduct in the presence of such beauty and power and holiness as was represented by this crown which had come down through countless generations of Maharajahs and Kings, from the God Siva himself, it was believed, to the Maharajah Joodha who wore it now.

There was not a millimetre of it that was not jewelled, mostly with diamonds and pearls. Over each ear hung a cluster of emeralds the size and shape of a bunch of grapes. There was an emerald as long and thick as a large man's thumb on one side, and on the back was another, the size of a cocktail sausage. The ruby on top was an inch in diameter, blood red with a blazing globe of sunlight in its heart. Tawny bird of paradise plumes swept from the front to the back in a graceful arc.

His Highness turned slowly so that we might see the ex-



AN OLD SADDHU : THE BUMP IS RAISED BY CONTINUALLY
POUNDING HIS FOREHEAD ON THE GROUND IN PRAYER



'MY LITTLE GIRL'

quisite details of the helmet, the minute engraving on some of the flat emeralds, the double head of three-eyed Siva designed in diamonds, and the peacock that was made of dozens of small carved emeralds.

The secretary came forward but I was scarcely aware of him. "Do you wish to film His Highness," he asked, "with or without his specs?"

So brilliant was the helmet in the sun that the needle of my light metre ran beyond its scale, and so great was the contrast between the jewels and the Maharajah's clothes that we had to illuminate him from the neck down with our large sun reflectors. He shifted uneasily as that blast of hot light fell on him. He was trying to be sporting, but the sweat slid over his forehead, and between his heavy brows came the frown that condemned men to death or the slow torture I had seen a few nights ago at Gaokarran. Roy and I worked furiously with five cameras, the 35 mm. Akeley, the 16 mm. Kodak with colour film, two Leicas loaded with black-and-white and Kodachrome and the Ikonta for a long-shot still. Armand talked charmingly to the secretary, but the translation was lost upon the suffering Maharajah, and even Leila's smile, scarcely less dazzling than the helmet, fell with an almost audible plop into the darkness of His Highness's mind.

"Cut it," said Armand, when the sons also were beginning to look grim.

We moved to the cool shadows. The Maharajah put the helmet carelessly over the horn of the gruesome rhino head. A golden *khukri*, the curved knife of Nepal, was placed in his hands and he in turn presented it to Leila with the second smile of the day.

The secretary translated through grinding teeth. "His Highness . . . wishes . . . you to present this *khukri* . . . to your cousin . . . the President of the United States . . . with the best wishes of the Maharajah of Nepal. . . ."

Leila was unaware that Roy was still filming. Graciously

she accepted the splendid golden blade, and thanked His Highness on behalf of the President and ourselves. The doors swung slowly together ; the band of sunlight was squeezed to a bright wire across the floor and then was dissolved by darkness. We packed and went out to face the credible reality of Hospitality and the dear shabby Dodge.



34 The Heart of a World

SO FAR, WE felt, we had done tolerably well with the film, considering the bans and limitations placed on our activities. Day by day we had recorded the typical aspects of Nepalese life, seeking always to film what belonged to Nepal alone, and not India or Tibet from which so much of its culture derives and with which it is often blended. This was always difficult, and it was particularly so on the day when we went to film the great Swayambhunath Temple, the very core of Nepalese Buddhism surrounded by Brahmanism in its purest form.

The temple stands on an isolated hill about half a mile west of Khatmandu, and according to tradition was built by King Gorades nearly three thousand years ago. But the hill, itself artificial, dates back to the very beginnings of Nepal, so the legend avers. When the god Manjusri cleft the Mahabharat mountains and allowed the lake to drain from what is now the Nepal Valley, he found a sacred lotus growing by the stream that remained, the Baghmatti River, as we call it now. So he planted around it a grove of trees which has lasted to the present day, the wood of Pashupatti, a shrine soon to become doubly sacred, when Mahadeo, a Hindu god, came through Pashupatti bearing on his shoulder the half-burnt corpse of his consort, Parvati, and bits of her body fell on the ground here, thus sanctifying it.

The root of the lotus being protected by the wood, Manjusri buried the stem for the mile of its extent and built over the blossom the Swayambhunath Hill. The exact place of the root is now indicated by a silver Yoni, the female emblem, from which gushes a clear stream of water, and the blossom is represented by a perpetual flame kept in the temple of Swayambhunath.

Manjusri looked over his work and found it good. He had begun a nation and insured a religion for it. He called it Nepal, from the two words, *Ne*, meaning deity, the Adi Buddha, and *pala*, cherished—the Cherished of God.

The pilgrims from Tibet and India, after their long journeys, must confront the flight of six hundred steps leading up to the Swayambhunath Temple. At the foot of them were three stone Buddhas about thirty feet high and a *mandal*, a circular rock with Buddha's footprints engraved on it for the pilgrims to kiss. An old sheep was resting his chin between them. A cow walked with dignity up a dozen steps, changed her mind and came down again. Hundreds of monkeys scrambled over the stairs and the Buddhas, regarding us most inimically.

"Let's go," said Armand. We went painfully, consoled only by the terrific burdens of moving picture equipment which the coolies were carrying. Up and up we went, stone step by step, beneath the arched foliage of trees that enclosed the heat and pressed it against us. Up we staggered past ancient images of Garuda, Siva's bird, surmounted by small Buddha figures to show that the Hindu god is subordinate here. Two hundred and thirteen steps were behind us when we came to what must surely be the oldest gods in the world, a long rock and a round rock, unhewn, on each of which was simply painted two eyes.

"Gosh!" said Jack, "this kind of a tour would knock the religion out of anybody."

The ascent at first had been gradual but as we neared the top it slanted as close to the vertical as the steps of a step-ladder.

Our faces were mottled white and red when at last, using our hands, we reached the golden thunderbolt of Indra, five feet long, that lay at the temple's base. We collapsed on the porch of one of the several small monasteries.

"I should have filmed that climb," said Roy. "How would you feel about . . ." We had not even the strength to look at him, nor did he have the breath to go on.

Swayambhunath Temple resembled Bodhinath in general form. It had the same solid hemispherical base of earth and brick, about sixty feet in diameter and thirty in height, supporting a square *toran* with a lofty conical spire divided into thirteen laminations of gold plate representing the thirteen heavens of the Buddhist cosmography. On the four sides of the *toran* were painted the eyes of Buddha, inscrutable, omniscient, benign. Bodhinath was severely simple in setting. Swayambhunath arose from a veritable forest of smaller temples and shrines, mostly Hindu, of gigantic bells hung from granite arches, of innumerable thunderbolts on their lotus-shaped pedestals called *Dharmdhatu-mandal*, the homes of spirits. Gilt dragons guarded this majestic temple, and a blazing peacock watched over all from the vantage of a huge pillar cut from a single block of stone.

Though this was a Tibetan sanctuary the Indian shrines sprouted like mushrooms all around it, and at one corner of the sacred area rose a crumbling *sikbra*, a pyramidal tower with convexly curved sides, such as is found everywhere in the plains of India.

"The devil of it is," said Armand, "that there is no purely Nepalese religion, and yet this mixture of the religions of India and Tibet is purely Nepalese, peculiar to this country and none other in the world. Does that make sense? I'll have to clarify it somehow before I face an audience in New York. Good Lord, look at that . . ."

Inch-worming up the enormous stairs, falling flat upon them, measuring his length, rising and falling again, came the

spit and image of the blind pilgrim we had seen plunge to his death in the mountains. With a sob of joy he reached the temple pediment, but he did not pause. He walked around it slowly, spinning the hundreds of prayer-wheels set into the cement. When he had made the circuit he sat down before a separate small temple and struck his head upon the ground in worship of some god we could not see, but whose name was evidently Devi Sitla, for he pronounced it over and over again.

These devotions finished, he looked around and caught the eyes of Armand. His own eyes lighted as if he had personally met his god. He struggled to his feet, a nude, emaciated horror with a beard to his waist, and sat beside Armand with a pitiful sigh. He reached for his hand and held it tightly. He put his head on Armand's knee and went blissfully to sleep.

We tried gently to pry him away, but it was useless. He sighed and Armand sighed. "What do I do about this?" he asked plaintively. "Maybe he's holy."

"He's crumbly," said Jack. "Hell, I'll take him." He took him gently by the other hand, and gently pulled, but the old man stretched like a rubber band before finally letting go. Resignedly he went off with Jack, but his sweet rheumy eyes looked back woefully at Armand. For the rest of the afternoon we had him with us, one or the other of us always holding his hand while the rest of the expedition filmed Swayambhunath. Armand was distinctly his favourite.

He was in Leila's care when she called to us to look down the stairs. Up came the eighteen devil-dancers we had selected three weeks ago and completely forgotten. They were full of *raksi*, Nepalese rum, I judged, by the energy with which they slung on their fiendish masks and began wildly leaping the moment they reached the top. The musicians came after them with a terrific squalling of flutes and horns.

"Fine!" Armand exclaimed. "This is a perfect setting for them, and that flight of stairs should keep the kibitzers away. Let's set up, Roy."

The first fine frenzy of the dancers waned quickly as the rum wore off. Armand flung down the ear-phones of the sound-recording apparatus and leaped among them, waving his long arms, kicking, pirouetting to inspire them to greater efforts, but they were so delighted with this performance that they raised their demons' masks, hiked up their star-spangled skirts and squatted. Here was a dance that *was* a dance, they seemed to think. The band worked harder and so did Armand. Jack and I hoisted the dancers to their feet again and we all danced except Leila who was busy Tarzaning from wall to wall of the enclosure, clearing off the spectators who had braved the stairs and now were spoiling our background. A young *saddhu* wearing only a leopard skin around his loins she allowed to remain as a natural property.

"Dave, see if you can get permission for us to shoot from that balcony."

Thapa and I entered the two-storeyed building that formed one side of the temple enclosure, and climbed a ladder—very few Nepalese houses have stairs—to the rooms along the balcony. An old man was cooking in the first. He flew at me in a rage as I tried to enter, for I, a foreigner, would poison his food by my very presence. He was a Brahman, and I, of course, was lower than the lowest Indian caste, fouler than the Untouchables. In the semi-darkness of the next room a girl was lighting a trayful of candles from a taper. These were to be burned before the images in the various shrines, and so of course we could not go in there either. The third room was so deep and low that daylight could not reach its inner wall. Humbly we entered half-way and when our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness we saw four Tibetan Lamas sitting around a large copper cauldron which contained a small burning wick. Its pale blue flame barely illuminated the ghee on which it floated, the polished rim of the copper pot and the serene faces of the Lamas. Thapa hastily drew me away from this eerie scene.

That was the sacred flame, he whispered, when we reached the balcony, the light of Adi Buddha which has never been extinguished since it sprang from his brow at the beginning of time. From it the candles we saw in the next room were lighted. I returned to the temple courtyard sincerely awed and considerably shaken, for I had seen the flaming blood of Buddha. I had entered the heart of a world.

All afternoon we filmed the dancers, with sound and in colour, and took such shots as we were permitted of life in the precincts of Swayambhunath. Children made their small but intense devotions to the goddess Vajra Dhateswari of the lewd Tantric cult. She had seven eyes, two in her face, one in her forehead, one in the palm of each hand, and one on the sole of each foot. A priest whose brow was smeared with ashes sat before the shrine of Mahenkal—one of the avatars of Siva—reading from the Vedas, swinging a bell with one hand and a thunderbolt with the other while a crowd of worshippers chanted in response to him and anointed the image with revolting unguents. God Mahenkal, adamant, threatened them with a trident decorated with human skulls. In contrast to this Hindu worship of terror was the whole family of Newar Buddhists, children, parents, and grandparents, who circled the Swayambhunath Temple spinning the *manis*, the prayer-wheels, then knelt cheerfully together before the huge image of Akshobya, the second divine Buddha, whose skin is brilliant blue.

Here was a welter of fantasy, of horror, colour, urgent movement, to appal the New World mind, an acre of holiness filled with the pilgrims of two faiths and a double faith, whose life was in death, in the ultimate escape from living by the route of Karma (transmigration) for the Hindus, by Karma and Nirvana for the Buddhists, by God only knows what confusion of means for the pilgrims who worshipped at those alloyed, equivocal shrines.

While the rest were packing I wandered back and forth

through the narrow passages separating the various *vihars* at the circumference of the quadrangle, seeking a good foreground for a long-shot of the great temples. At every turn I faced another shrine, mound-shaped or pagoda-shaped if it was Buddhist, phallus-shaped if Brahman, usually with a closely wrought grill of iron to protect the relic within. Rice had been thrown as offerings into them, and the monkeys were busy reaching for it, their arms extended far inside, their chins twisted back where the grill checked them. Out of the mouths of gods they were stealing, but when I approached any of these shadowy shrines even the children would rush glaring and panting in menace before me. Here a monkey was cleaner than a man.

We went down the six hundred steps slowly and cheerfully, for it had been a good day's work. Armand was whistling, and from somewhere in the sunset above us came the notes of a gong driving away the evil spirits which would now be prowling around Swayambhunath. Armand's whistle wound between these golden gong notes like a wire of silver, smooth, cool, almost tangible. You felt you could put your hand on it to guide you down the darkening stairs.

"By the way," he asked suddenly, "what became of my devoted old man?"

"I decorated him with some of the adhesive tape from the film cans," Roy replied. "I made a trident on his chest and an eye on his back. He was delighted. Last time I saw him he was still trying to re-arrange the eye. He was tied in such knots that I don't think he saw us leave."

Armand laughed. "Thapa, what was that little temple to which the old man paid his respects? It was certainly Hindu, although he did go to the Buddhist Swayambhunath first."

"Oh, that," said Thapa, the Brahman, flinging a Buddhist rock with an eye painted on it at a sacred Hindu monkey, a strange sort of ritual indeed, "that was the temple of

the goddess Devi Sitla. The goddess of smallpox, you know."

Armand didn't whistle any more.



The Poucher

35

NOW IT WAS October, the month of Assan by the Hindu calendar, a blessed month of festivals and forgiveness, of worship and the cruellest slaughter in an old god's name; October, and suddenly, urgently, we must turn from the East towards our own culture which was being flayed, as the Newar culture had been not long ago, by a transmigrated Gurkha.

"Sahib Davie," said Ram, our warrior cook, who was busy polishing my brass knuckles, his chief delight next to throwing away eggs, "name of Adolf no good for fighting. Ram, yes; Davie, yes; Akbar, Bahadur, Allahadeen, Durga, Jenghiz, yes; but Adolf for pocket-picketing. Pah!" he said.

As a fine fighting man whose fingers had partly been bitten off while he tore an Afghan's jaw apart, Ram should have known the propitious names. Perhaps Adolf was not among them, but even this early in the war and this far from the scene of it, it had invoked the sinking of ships in the Arabian Sea, occasioned nationalist riots in India and caused the rationing of the petrol upon which we should be dependent for further work in the East.

Every night, as we listened grimly to Colonel Rand's radio, it became more and more evident that if we wished to reach New York by Christmas, adding on the way an African chapter to our trans-hemispherical film, we had better skip the Indian sequence we had originally planned, and get as fast as possible to Bombay. There was nothing more for

us in Nepal, Armand believed, nothing of consequence which we had been permitted to film and had missed. Colonel Rand advised us furthermore that the Indian Government did not look kindly upon moving-picture expeditions during times of war.

In addition to these good reasons for leaving Nepal as soon as we could, Hospitality arrived one morning with a long necklace of flowers for Leila. With His Highness's compliments, he said. Compliments nothing! It was such a floral necklace, bound with gold thread and dripping with tassels, as is commonly given by Indian princes to their departing guests. This one even had ants in it.

"You will want to go, perhaps on Thursday?" Hospitality asked. "Sssss . . ." he started to add, but Armand checked him.

"We should love it," he replied firmly. "If we can finish our work in time."

"Thursday would be very nice," said our Officer in Charge of Hospitality Department. "I shall have porters for you Thursday."

That was that, according to Hospitality, and though we had no intention of outwearing our welcome and indeed were most grateful to His Highness for letting us visit Nepal at all, none the less when Thursday came and we had not yet finished a sequence we were doing on the monastic life, we looked with some annoyance upon the three-score coolies who had assembled in our garden. Armand explained that it was not possible to leave until the day after to-morrow. They explained that then it would not be possible for them to go. We would get other coolies, said Armand. There were no others, said Hospitality. We must go now, to-day.

In the midst of this altercation, with sixty-odd coolies milling about the garden and trying to spy into the windows of the resthouse, Armand discovered suddenly that he had lost the gold identification tag of the New York Explorers Club. It

had been the only object in his watch pocket, and as he had a habit of resting his thumb in this slit and twiddling the tag over and over, he instantly detected its loss. It had certainly been stolen, for he had felt it only a few moments ago, and the pocket was too tight for it to have slipped out by itself. We must have one of Ram's "pocket-pickers" amongst us.

"Jack, close that gate," Armand ordered quietly, "and stand by it."

Hospitality was horrified when he learned of the theft. He jumped on to the porch and waved his arms at the coolies. His moustache and his glasses see-sawed, for this was a terrible thing; a guest of His Highness had been robbed. He yelled and gesticulated and threatened to no avail, until gradually the coolies, who had been curiously listening at first, began to laugh, but they laughed very cleverly, turning their backs to us so that Hospitality could not point out any one of them for punishment. They laughed and laughed.

Armand's eyes were furious, and my pulse was pounding hard in my temples as he started towards that half-hysterical mob.

"Armand! Wait!" I called. He stopped and glared at me. "Let me try something, will you?"

"I've got something I'd like to try myself, but go ahead. It isn't the tag I'm sore about. It's just . . ."

"I know. Jack, bring those guards in here, will you?"

The two tough little Gurkha guards who were always at our gate came in with their bayonets and rifles. They were plainly itching for a fight, even at the odds of sixty to two.

"Get them to line up these coolies," I ordered Hospitality. "Now tell them that the machine in my hand will show every sin that every man of them has committed. Understand? Tell them that the needle will swing way over when I point it at the man who stole Sahib Denis's tag."

Armand was standing close behind me. "And if it doesn't

work," he murmured, "you will have got us into a worse mess than ever. We'll be the laughing-stock of Nepal."

I had no doubt of it, but I walked confidently to the first man in line and held my photo-electric light meter close to his chest, letting the rest of the coolies see that the needle swung over when I moved the meter towards the man, and swung back when I moved it away. It was simple enough to control it by pointing the meter at white or brown portions of his clothing. As the light was reflected by the white shirt the sensitive indicator swung far across the dial.

"Tell him, Hospitality, that he used to be pretty sinful, but that he has been obedient to Buddha for a long while now."

This seemed near enough to the truth, judging by the exclamations of the other coolies. Up the line I went, holding the light meter to each man's chest and reading from it his degree of sin. And as I moved from coolie to coolie I noticed that there was always one stocky little Tibetan in front of the crowd watching the needle and the sin reactions. He had the face of a were-wolf, I should imagine, scarred and abscessed, and lined with the wrinkles of what must be very original sins.

When I had established that the needle did move in response to the characters of the men, I moved the crowd surrounding me back into line. I put the Tibetan near the end of it.

There was not a sound in the garden but the nervous breathing of the coolies and my own voice magisterially announcing virtue and sin. Behind me came Hospitality and the guards, behind the coolies the other members of the expedition ready to pounce upon the guilty one if I should discover him.

When I was at least a dozen men away from the werewolf Tibetan I saw that he was beginning to tremble, and felt sure that it was he who had stolen the tag. I took my time about the readings now, telling intricate fortunes that should

get me a job in any gipsy tea-room. When I reached the Tibetan finally and held the light meter to his dirty bare chest, his breath was shuddering through his teeth. I tipped the meter slightly to let the light from the sky fall on it, for his skin was dark as his jacket. The needle swung over and hovered near the 800 mark.

"Grab him!" I said.

Jack seized him from behind, the soldiers from each side.

"I'll get it," said Hospitality, his moustachio teetering furiously. The Tibetan was flung to the ground and Hospitality straddled his chest. Then instead of searching his clothing, what little of it there was, he did a very curious thing. He pried open the man's mouth with the point of a *khukri*, turned the blade sideways so as to keep it wide, and slipped two fingers far down his throat. The Tibetan squirmed, coughed, half strangled. When Hospitality withdrew his hand he held in it the golden tag.

"But where the devil was it?" we asked, when the thief had been dragged away for punishment between the two guards.

Hospitality explained then what I had occasion to check later with a Superintendent of Indian police. The Tibetan was adept at "pouching," a trick developed in prison, where there was ample time for the practice of it, and taught to the young by the old "lags," the hardened criminals, usually of the Bhamptra or Harni tribes. The prisoner suspends a lump of lead from a short string and drops it part way down his throat, securing the string to a back tooth where the warder is unlikely to notice it. The lump is a small one at first, about the size of a bean, so there is very little discomfort to it. Its size is increased from week to week, and gradually the pressure of it creates an invaluable pouch in the soft folds of the epiglottis, where jewels, keys, coins, or Explorers Club tags can be cached. It is certainly a technical improvement over the Western smuggler's use of the normal body orifices.

"The other porters are honest," said Hospitality. "Now they will take your baggage."

"The hell they will," Armand replied, gingerly dropping the recovered tag into the glass of potassium permanganate solution Leila had brought him. "I wouldn't take a man of these cut-throats, these laughing hyenas, and I'll tell you again that we can't finish our work until the day after to-morrow. I'm sorry, but we must continue with it right now. Good morning."

Hospitality left without argument, evidently reflecting that it would be unpleasant if the Maharajah should hear that one of his coolies had robbed us.



36

Blood for Gods

IT WAS THE next day, when we tried to buy a paper umbrella for shading the camera lens, that we first noticed a strange inactivity in the streets of Khatmandu. The shops were closed, and even the worship at the temples was conducted very quietly. When Thapa arrived in the afternoon we questioned him about it.

"It is Dasehra now, the great festival," he replied.

Dasehra? That was the most important religious festival of the Nepalese year, the occasion for the great buffalo sacrifice, one of the weirdest dramas of worship the world contains. Now it was clear why we had been urged to leave Nepal a few days ago, so that we should be well out of the way when the Dasehra commenced. It was clear too that we could get no coolies, just as Hospitality had said, until the festival was over.

Hospitality had always equivocated when asked about the buffalo sacrifice, or denied that it existed, which was a stupid lie as it had been witnessed by every British Envoy to Khat-

mandu. It did seem reasonable, however, that the progressive Maharajah, who was doing his best to educate his people, should not want us to record to the horror of our own people the stupendous gory sacrifice that was the climax of the Dasehra.

Armand sent a note to him that afternoon explaining that we had remained the extra two days beyond the time specified by Hospitality (and not officially by His Highness) in order to do justice on film to this remarkable country, that we might re-acquaint the turbulent West with the values which Nepal had so admirably guarded: peace, social and industrial harmony, independence, courage and faith. We were now forced to remain through the Dasehra because of lack of coolies to get us across the mountains. It was urgent indeed that we go, but since we must stay for ten more days would His Highness permit us to film the festival, cognizant as we were of its religious importance?

A note in reply came within the hour. His Highness was pleased that we could stay a few days longer, he wrote. However, he requested that we take no photographs of any part of the Dasehra as it might cause trouble among the people. No photographs at all. That was too bad, of course, but we were honourably bound to abide by the injunction.

The Dasehra, or Durga Puja, was originally a Hindu festival to commemorate the victory of the goddess Durga (one of Kali's cruel avatars) over the monster Maheshur, but with the gradual absorption of Buddhism by Brahmanism even the orthodox Buddhist Newars have come to take part in it, though they do not actually participate in the slaughter of the buffaloes. This slaughter is the ritual which chiefly distinguishes the festival from its counterpart in India to-day, where the British have reduced it to the minor murders of sickly goats. It occurs always in the month of Assan (September-October) at a date fixed by the astrologers according to the position of the moon. It lasts ten days, but it is

only the final four—called Phulpati, Astami, Naumi, and Dasami—that are distinctly different from the usual Himalayan festivals.

On the first day the Nepalese sow barley in the earth surrounding the shrines of Durga. On the seventh, because all implements of war are worshipped at this time, they assemble in hordes at the Thuni Khel parade ground where the King—not the Maharajah, but the usually invisible King—makes a brief appearance to the roaring of the entire artillery. The little King says not a word—he couldn't be heard anyway—for he is forbidden ever to speak in public, a ban probably made by Jang Bahadur to insure that all official utterances should come from him alone. Poor lonely King of Nepal, Tribhubana Bir Vikram Sah, who would be content with such little power as an equestrian enjoys!

At sunset on the eighth day, Astami, the actual sacrificial ceremony begins and lasts throughout the night, a circumstance which would have prevented effective photography, even if it had been permitted. Our magnesium flares would have thrown the entire populace into fits. Durga would doubtless be thought to have manifested herself in fire, as a suggestion to sacrifice the intrusive white men. On the tenth or last day, the Dasami, it is customary for the officers and public officials at the capital to pay a visit of respect to the Maharajah, and make him a pecuniary gift, from one rupee upwards, a sizeable perquisite in sum.

The subject of sacrifice, of offering life for gain, is to me and most of us, I believe, a fascinating religious survival. What I have to say of it here will not make pretty reading, but it is as essential to record in print as was the heart-breaking transportation of burdens on film, for five million people, enviably happy people on the whole, attribute their good fortune to this spilling of blood. There is, furthermore, very little difference in attitude between theirs and that of aggressor nations who believe that the sacrifice of war exalts them.

Even human sacrifice in India can by no means be claimed suppressed among the fanatics of the native states. In the United Provinces, as late as 1932, the police records instance the sacrifice of a nine-year-old-girl by seven professional women singers who for some reason found themselves hoarse on the morning of an engagement, and so cut the child to pieces as an offering to Bhowani. In the midst of British-ruled Calcutta, an idol of the goddess Kali squats in a pit and receives daily the blood of goats sacrificed before her; and many a British sportsman, so called, has told of the animal sacrifices performed by the *Haran-shikaris*, the deer hunters, who drink the blood of their victims.

That in Nepal, far beyond the reach of Christian law, there should exist human sacrifice, I have no doubt at all. That buffaloes are literally slain by the thousands as sacrifice to Durga, I can personally attest.

I learned from Thapa, Hospitality—who had at last given up dissimulation as hopeless—and Colonel Rand, in whose fine library of Nepalese documents I confirmed this information, that the Dasehra festival, although the greatest, was not at all the only one at which sacrifices were offered in Nepal. The Bhairabjatra or Biskati takes place annually in each of the three principal cities of the valley; male dancers represent the gods, known as Dharmis; several buffaloes are slaughtered, and these Dharmis drink the hot blood as it issues from the bodies of the animals.

A similar festival, slightly more revolting as well as more important religiously, is the Neta Devi Rajatra which takes place at Devi Ghat, near Nayakot. The statue of Bhairavi Devi is brought to the ghat from her temple in the town, and for five days buffaloes are slaughtered in worship of her, while a youth and a girl of the Newar tribe, the Dharmis, gulp the blood of the animals and are worshipped by thousands of pilgrims as if they were actual deities. On these occasions the two Dharmis drink so much blood, according to

eye-witnesses, that their bellies are actually distended, and after a time they are forced to vomit the blood up to make room for more, as we are told the Romans debauched themselves to indulge in further gluttony. A nice point of nausea here, however, is that the blood vomited is carefully collected, distributed among the worshippers and saved as a sacred relic of the goddess's actual presence at the ceremony.

On the sixth day Bhairavi Devi is carried back to her temple at Nayakot, to remain until the following year. There is no temple to her elsewhere, with the exception of a heap of stones at Devi Ghat, walled in by crude planks, to which the Newars make obeisance while her image is away. They believe that she herself resides in the malarious jungles of the Terai during the rainy season, and that those who do not make offerings at the shrine will, if exposed to the *awal* fever, promptly die. The fever is suspended, furthermore, during the five days of the festival, and will never afflict those votaries who celebrate her at this time.

Neither Bhairab nor Bhairavi exact such sacrifice as the goddess Durga during the Dasehra, for this festival is spread nation-wide during the ten days devoted to it, whereas the other two are local. Jang Bahadur told Dr. Oldfield that at the Dasehra of 1850 over nine thousand buffaloes were killed, and though this is possibly an exaggeration there is no doubt that the victims, even to-day, are of an appalling number, for every regimental officer, from the rank of *jemadar* (lieutenant) upwards must sacrifice a buffalo, the higher officers two or three, and since the forty-five thousand troops of Nepal are exceedingly well officered—they are chosen by reason of social position rather than military efficiency—the sacrifices surely run well into the thousands.

We deliberately missed the festivities during the first seven days of Dasehra, the review of the troops, the donations to the Maharajah, etc., because we felt it unwise to attract notice to ourselves at this hysterical period if we were to be present

at the climax of slaughter. We should have regretted not seeing the King, that strange, sinister, and pathetic figure, but this year he made no appearance. He was ill. As we worked on the outskirts of Khatmandu during the fifth, sixth, and seventh days great kites were everywhere flying over our heads, bearing printed messages for the gods to read. Swings were erected in every field and most of the public squares, and children went whooping up in them to shout a god's name at each end of the bright arc they cut across the background of Himalayan snows. Crowds of rough and ragged fellows shouted gladly in the streets, for they were of the convicts always pardoned at Dasehra time.

On the eighth day of festival the city became a bedlam of lowing buffaloes. They jammed the streets. The parade ground looked like the scene of a Texas round-up. In Bhatgaon, Patan, Kirtipur, it was the same; there were radial processions of buffaloes being driven in from the mountains by the peasant tribes, to be bought by the soldiers for sacrifice. Hospitality never left our side, nor did his notebook leave his hand. He would answer our questions frankly now, but he also entered them in the book with our every action. I should like to have had those minutes to supplement my own notes on our strange adventures in Nepal.

The sun went down in a curious effect that evening; down the snow valleys of the mountains its last rays ran like streams of pale blood, stretching longer and longer, continually closer to Khatmandu. Then a cannon bawled across the city, and we hurried to the Durbar square where the terrible sacrifices were already beginning. Buffaloes in droves of dozens were being driven to the Kot. They were garlanded with flowers now, and their horns were painted red and gold. Symbolizing evil to the Hindus as cows symbolized good, they walked with great dignity as if conscious and proud of the colossal sin that was in them. Only when they came to the immense image of Khal Bhairab in the centre of the square, and caught

the scent of goat's blood which had already been smeared on her monstrous feet, did they shy away and try to escape from the army officers who were herding them into the Kot.

It was here, I remember, that in 1846 had occurred the greatest massacre in the bloody history of Nepal, when the King's men had been chased like rats in the dark and the mad Queen had attempted to butcher a man in chains. Now there were seven regiments quartered here, every man of them demanding blood.

Leila had said she would stay at home, thank you ; massacres left her cold.

It was a nightmare scene into which we came and unobtrusively merged ; the stench struck us first, the stench of steaming blood, then the charnel-house heap of decapitated buffaloes. We separated so that we should be less obvious and kept to the shadows at the back of the Kot courtyard. I pressed hard against the spikes of a dragon's mane, hoping the pain of it would keep down my heaving gorge. Try to be objective about it, I told myself ; it has nothing to do with you ; the knife doesn't hurt you ; the gushing blood of men smells worse, and you've endured that. Breathe deep ; immunize your fussy lungs to it. For God's sake, are you an explorer or just a cheap poet still ?

The court was a furious din of sound, of bands playing and guns being shot in volleys, the groans of the struggling victims, the shouts of the crowd, the crazy ringing of bells to drive off the evil spirits, the monotonous mutter of prayers lying like a spine at the base of these ribs of sound. The colour of the scene was kaleidoscopic, for around the courtyard were ranged the flags of the seven regiments, to be blessed in blood. In the centre was an enormous statue of the goddess Durga, leering with fanglike teeth and her three awful eyes upon the butchery at her feet.

The garlanded buffaloes were pushed and hauled before the

goddess and given into the hands of the *Kassais*, or butcher priests. The beast's head was quickly fastened to a post, its nose to the ground, and stretched backward by a rope around its loins so as to extend the neck. The priest raised the curved and dripping *kbukri*, or the heavier *kora* if the animal were large, and sliced it down with all his might, to decapitate the buffalo with a single blow. Usually he succeeded; the body flopped over, kicking, and the crowd shouted acclamation. But occasionally one blow was insufficient, and the priest would then be set upon by the good-natured but scoffing worshippers and his face was smeared with the hot blood spurting from the partially severed throat.

My stomach felt like a washing machine, churning my dinner in blood.

Immediately after decapitation the carcasses were dragged off by the regiment's servants and porters, who had this meat as their pay. If they were orthodox and could not eat it they would sell it to the wild Gurungs and Tcherpas of the hills. High along the walls of the courtyard these bodies were piled, the blood cascading from them over the feet of the crowd. In one corner sat a Brahman, the officiating priest of the ceremony, chanting incessantly the proper verses from the Hindu sacred books, weaving Buddhist gestures over the little flame in front of him which had been brought from the eternal flame of Swayambhunath. As each animal was sacrificed its dripping head was piled upon the heap of the others in front of him, and each one was strewn with a few petals of the sacred marigold. Snip, snip, snip, they came off, as in the daisy game of love which our children play. The pile grew swiftly, a wall of bleeding death in front of the imperturbable old man.

I moved to get a better view of a shadowed figure behind him. My moccasins squished with blood. The erratic electric current flared the lights for a second, and in that time I saw the shadow's face, the face of the child at the Narain pool,

my lovely youngster who had been miraculously healed. A hand closed on my arm then. It was Thapa.

"They will not hurt her," he said. "She will be the Kumari, the daughter of Kali, at the Rathjatra to-morrow. Don't bother yourself, sahib; she will live. It is an honour."

My eyes were jerked back by the fearful wail of a buffalo that was being led to the post by two stalwart priests.

"Newar men!" said Thapa. "Ugh!"

Up until now the hundreds of sacrifices I had witnessed had been performed by the Gurkhas, in a manner, which, I suppose, was moderately humane, in that it had been done so quickly that the animals could not have greatly suffered. What I was about to see, the Newar method, was different indeed.

The crowd had worked itself into a holy frenzy by now, chanting the praises of goddess Durga, demanding her protection of the troops, asking and promising blood. The explosions of musketry were incessant; the pounding of drums and the squeal of flutes, the brassy stridor of horns, the sporadic, single, hideous wail, "*Durga Ma Ki Jai!*" ("Victory to Mother Durga!") and the answering bellow of "*Main bookhi hun!*" ("I am starved for blood!"), created a bedlam which it is impossible to reproduce in this chaste print. The light from the bare electric bulbs pulsated as the current changed, and four ghee-soaked torches sputtered constantly, waving their flames across a small shrine where an erect naked sword stood instead of the image of Durga. One torch tipped over against a carcass. Flame played like sheet lightning through the short fatty hair, and the reek of burned flesh was added to the odour of simple death.

The buffalo to be sacrificed by the Newars in their own elaborate fashion was flung to the ground, its nose tied to the post and its four legs bound tightly together. The poor creature was pulled this way and that, while the butcher priest, who apparently considered himself an artist, deliberated upon

the best position for his work. At last he straddled the heaving throat, and carefully made an incision about a foot long down each side of the windpipe. Then with his small knife and his finger-nails he dissected out from each slit a portion of the internal jugular vein corresponding to the length of the incision. This he did slowly and cautiously for fear of tearing the vein, running his fingers several times up and down the length of it to detach it completely on every side.

It was horrible, and added to the horror of it was the callous wrangling of the officiating priests, taunting their colleague with clumsy work, hurling what sounded like pretty nasty epithets at him. I felt sure there was going to be a fight over the poor animal when the priest who was opening its throat leaped up and brandished his fists, in one of which was the knife, at his tormentors. I looked around for a handy exit and saw in the shadow not far from me the tense sweating faces of Armand and Roy, and in the shadow behind the old Brahman, still muttering over his book and tossing marigold petals on the mound of severed heads, the calm beauty of my little girl.

When both jugular veins were finally exposed, the buffalo—still alive, for it had bled very little—was thumped and dragged before the loathsome image of Durga, and held with its torn throat erect while the priest quickly made a vertical slit in each of the veins. The blood geysered forth in parallel jets across the shrine and figure of the goddess, and over the quantity of rice which had been offered to it.

Again came the cry, "*Main bookhi hum ! Main bookhi hum !*" as the Newars rushed to scoop up the blood-drenched rice.

"They will eat it!" said Thapa in my ear. "It is an honour."

The groans of the buffalo could be heard even above the fanatic clamour of the crowd. Its big eyes rolled upwards, its flanks heaved; it struggled to rise, but the priests held it

down while one man directed the twin torrents of blood over the protuberant paunch of the goddess. This could not be real, I thought ; it was a nightmare, the ground clotted with coagulating blood, the heaped carcasses, the stench, the noise, the spots of light surrounding men who had become demons out of piety. But it was real. You wake from a nightmare, but not from the horror incarnate at the courts of the world's strangest land, Nepal.

It seemed for ever, but I imagine it was about twenty minutes before the last of the buffalo's blood had dripped from the jugular veins. The head flopped at the feet of the goddess, and the priest patted it as one might a faithful dog. Then the *Kassais* fell upon it with their *khukris* and the hot meat was distributed, now that the goddess had been fed.

It was too much for me. I took Thapa by the shoulder and pulled him to the obscure corner behind my brass dragon's tail, and squatting in the shadow there we cautiously lit a cigarette and passed it back and forth to fumigate our lungs.

"Not nice?" said Thapa, his white teeth grinning in the dark.

I didn't bother with that. I smoked hard.

Suddenly there was a blast of military trumpets and I came to my feet like a jack-in-the-box, banging my elbow—the funny-bone it was—on the dragon's tail. The Commander-in-Chief of the army, a grey-haired and dignified gentleman, was standing in the midst of the shambles, with an attendant bearing a brass basin of fresh blood in his hands. He was about to "bless the colours."

Solemnly he marched up to each of the seven flags of the regiments quartered in the Kot, and there was utter silence, a tense silence that struck your nerves with the impact of a shout, while he dipped both hands in the gore and clasped the fabric of each flag between them, leaving a splayed imprint on both sides. Every flag was treated thus ; it was blessed with blood. I could feel the tension of the officers as their

colours in this way gained the colour most dear to them, the colour of blood which had not been shed by the Nepalese since their participation in the last world war. I did not know then that eight thousand Gurkhas would within a few days be sent to India to protect the Maharajah's friend, the Emperor of India, the King of harassed England, from aggression by Hitler, Ram's "pocket-picketer." There was something beautiful in this, just what I can't say now, possibly the drama of a non-aggressive nation suing for the peace of Asia, possibly that the Commander-in-Chief was unafraid of blood and, judging by his fine old face, sincerely hated it.

The flags were furled and carried into dark doorways, seven slanting lines of colour jabbing at the darkness of Nepal. The troops dispersed and were replaced by the *zamindars*, the great land-owners, who on the first day of the festival had planted barley around Durga's shrine. The sprouts of it, blood-soaked, were now pulled up and distributed to the planters, who gave gifts to the Brahman priests in return for their care of this holy crop.

Thapa touched my arm, which trembled no longer; it was still numb from that crack on the funny-bone. So was my stomach, fortunately; I was numb all over. "Sahib Denis," said Thapa.

Armand stood beside me, an unlighted cigarette sticking straight out from his lips. "The Hays office," he said. "We couldn't have used the film anyway. I hope I can't even remember this."



37

My Little Girl

I WAS CONSCIOUS SUDDENLY that the voice of the old Brahman had risen from a mutter to an urgent chant. He rang a bell—it was clear and cold as ice water in that fetid place—and at once the servants began lugging off the several hundred buffalo heads and piling them like an inner wall within the torch-lit shrine where the sword of Durga stood. The priest turned to the shadow behind him and drew gently from it my little girl. She seemed dazed ; she was drugged perhaps. He put flowers in her hair and a garland of them around her shoulders. He touched her lips with gentle fingertips which had been dipped in holy water from the Baghmatti River.

“ They prepare her for Rathjatra,” Thapa whispered. “ She will be Kumari, daughter of Kali, if she is brave.”

“ Rathjatra ! ” Armand exclaimed quietly. “ Do you know what that means, Dave ? God help her ! ”

I listened only half attentively to Armand, for my thoughts were with that poor lovely child and whatever trials she must now endure. The Rathjatra was relatively a modern festival dating from the reign of a King of Khatmandu (Jayaprakasa Malla, A.D. 1740-50) when a young Banhra girl claimed to be possessed and asserted in her ravings that she was a Kumari or deity. The King, considering her an impostor, banished her and her family from the city and confiscated their property. But on that same night the Rani, or Queen, was seized with similar symptoms (probably hysteric epilepsy) and declared that she too was a Kumari. The King, now thoroughly alarmed and believing that the little girl must after all have been inspired, immediately took steps to make reparation for the wrong he had done her. He publicly declared her divinity and sent an elegant chariot to bring her from the jungle where she and her parents were starving. After offering to her his

worship and homage he endowed her handsomely and instituted in her honour an annual festival at which she should be drawn triumphantly through the streets of Khatmandu, attended by a high official bearing the King's own sword. As deities are always accompanied by guardian demi-gods he appointed to her two Banhra boys who should impersonate Ganesh and Mahenkal.

This festival has remained unchanged since its origin, except for the gruesome method of determining each year which of the girl's descendants is actually possessed by the Kumari. It is a test of courage ; if the child can endure it, as the original Kumari endured the King's cruelty, she will be known as a goddess, fêted splendidly and supported at government expense.

"Are you listening?" Armand asked.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." Most of the crowd with the exception of the priests had left the Kot by now. The child was finally decked to the satisfaction of the old Brahman, for he moved behind her, made prayer gestures with his hands, rang his brazen bell and uttered some word of kindly command. Slowly she moved forward through puddles of blood and blood-drenched flowers. She moved towards us and a light of recognition came to her eyes. Her hand brushed mine lightly.

"*Salaam*," she murmured. "*Ap ma-bap lai*." ("You are my father and my mother.")

Damn, I thought ; I can't let Armand see me cry.

We followed her with the priests, who showed no interest in us, to the shrine of Durga, ineffable Goddess of Terror and Death. The old Brahman put his lamp in her hands, bearing the eternal flame of Swayambhunath. She did not hesitate as she passed between the torches and through the low door into that reeking Bluebeard's chamber of a room. The grilled gate clanged shut behind her, and the priests settled themselves on their hams, careless of the blood, to

watch her for six hours through the only openings, the meshes of the grille.

"She will be a goddess," said Armand thoughtfully.

Yes, she would be a goddess, when the heart had withered in her; so she would.

I moved to the grille. She was sitting on the pedestal that supported Durga's upright sword, one hand resting on the bright blade of it. Her face was aglow with ecstasy. The flame of the small lamp wavered, wiping shadows across the piled heads of the sacrificial buffaloes, striking sparks in a hundred dead eyes, but she seemed unaware of them, so terrible and exquisite was the thing that was happening within her, the withering of the heart to the stony kernel that would be a god's.

Faintly another light slipped through the grille and touched the hair of the child. It was sunrise. Her forehead was bathed with it, and between her eyes there glowed like a ruby a single drop of bullock's blood, like the *tikka* of Brahma who created the world and the goddesses of it.

I turned away to rejoin the group of my own people, Leila, Armand, Jack, and Roy. The sun emerged suddenly from the Himalayan snows and slid down the gold roofs of the temples, skimming the homeward road which we should this day follow. My back was turned to Nepal and to my little girl, as it for ever must be. So help me.

